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The Life of Sir Peter-Paul Rubens

The Life of Sir Peter-Paul Rubens

Hon. M.A. Cantab.

Knight of the Golden Spur ; Lord of Steen ; Secretary in Ordinary to the Privy Council of His Catholic Majesty the King of Spain ; Court Painter to Their Most Serene Highnesses the Archdukes Albert and Isabella ; Gentleman of the Household to Her Most Serene Highness the Infanta Isabella ; Court Painter to His Most Serene Highness the Cardinal Infant Don Ferdinand ; Master of the Guild of St Luke ;
Dean of the Society of Romanists

BY

ANTHONY BERTRAM

*Haud semper errat vulgus, est ubi elegit, censuque claros
censet heroas suo.*—DOMINIQUE BAUDIUS.

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CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. MARIA PYPELINCKX (1561-C. 1588)	1
II. YOUTH (1577-1600)	15
III. ITALY (1600-1603)	20
IV. SPAIN (1603-1604)	28
V. THE LAST OF ITALY (1604-1609)	56
VI. ANTWERP (1608-1609)	71
VII. ISABELLA BRANT (1609-1616)	77
VIII. SIR DUDLEY CARLETON (1616-1621)	88
IX. MARIA DE' MEDICI (1622-1625)	104
X. RETROSPECT (1616-1623)	117
XI. POLITICS: PROLOGUE (1519-1626)	129
XII. POLITICS: HOLLAND (1626-1627)	141
XIII. INTERVAL (OCTOBER 1627-SEPTEMBER 1628)	157
XIV. POLITICS: SPAIN (SEPTEMBER 1628-JUNE 1629)	168
XV. POLITICS: ENGLAND (JUNE 1629-MARCH 1630)	177
XVI. HELENA FOURMENT (MARCH 1630-JUNE 1631)	194

CHAP.	PAGE
XVII. POLITICS: MARIA DE' MEDICI (JUNE 1631- DECEMBER 1631)	202
XVIII. POLITICS: EPILOGUE (DECEMBER 1631-1635)	211
XIX. OLD AGE (1633-1640)	221
LIST OF BOOKS CONSULTED	236
GENEALOGICAL TABLE	238

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

THE standard Life of Rubens is, of course, that of Max Rooses; and it is so admirable that I think it necessary to explain why I have undertaken the present work. The English edition of Rooses's *Life* is in two folio volumes, and both its size and its price prevent it from becoming a popular work. Moreover, it is, and has been for some time, out of print. Again, it is altogether too extraordinarily complete; it deals at length with the circumstances in which his works were executed; it describes his works; it gives particulars of all his pupils and collaborators; it examines his engravings; his engravers; his copyrights. All that is dull reading, which only the student will plough through for the sake of the information. I believe Rubens to have been a very great man, apart from his work, and I wish to pay my tribute to him by spreading this belief. His work requires no herald; it blows its own magnificent trumpet.

My object in this book, then, has been to present Rubens as a private individual and as a diplomat, and to strip my narrative of all purely scholastic material. I have concentrated on the part he played in politics, but in the chapters on his dealings with Sir Dudley Carleton and Maria de' Medici I have tried to show

the relationships into which his work drew him with two eminent patrons. They are, as it were, two picked specimens of the material which I have omitted. I hope, therefore, that I have omitted nothing which helps towards forming a conception of Rubens's character.

In order that my *Life* may be as straightforward a narrative as possible, I have almost abolished foot-notes and references. I have been able to do this with the better conscience because I have drawn the large majority of my material from two sources: Rooses's *Life* and the *Codex Diplomaticus Rubenianus*. This remarkable work, which is in six folio volumes, contains all hitherto discovered documents relating to the life of Rubens. It was compiled by a group of eminent Flemish scholars, working under the auspices of the city of Antwerp, and was published by Veuve de Backer. The first volume appeared in 1887, the last in 1909. Charles Ruelens undertook the vast labour of editing, and on his death was succeeded by Rooses. Here, then, is a rich source beyond which the biographer need not go. Infinite pains might produce a new letter or so, but my business has not been to add to the minutiae of Rubens scholarship but rather to concentrate what is known into a form acceptable to the impatience of the general reader.

The documents in the *Codex* are in several languages—Rubens's own letters being in Italian, Latin, Spanish, French, and Flemish—but the wisdom of the editors has translated everything into French, so that too great

a strain is not put on the linguistic powers of the student. I have made the fullest possible use of Rubens's own letters, and most of these now appear for the first time in English.

Other sources, which I have used sparingly, are listed at the end of this book. One of them, perhaps, requires some explanation. The *Rubens-Bulletijn* was a periodical publication issued between 1882 and 1910 by the official commission instituted by the Council of Antwerp for the compilation of the *Codex*. The *Bulletijn* is partly in French, partly in Flemish. It reported the proceedings of the commission and certain discoveries as they were made. In some cases fuller details were supplied than afterwards appeared in the *Codex*.

I have entirely discarded all legends and anecdotes, however tempting, so that every statement in this book rests on documentary evidence.

Although I am not now primarily concerned with Rubens as a painter, it may be well to set out what his own correspondence reveals of his æsthetic outlook. This can be done very shortly, because his letters are extremely poor in such matter. He seems to have been satisfied with expressing himself in paint, and most of his writing deals with politics, material affairs, classical inscriptions and antiquities of all sorts—particularly agates, engraved gems, and coins, on which he was one of the European experts of his day. These learned discourses I have, of course, omitted, because they are of interest only to the specialist.

There are but two references, apart from what may be found in the text of this book, to which I wish to draw attention now.

In a letter to Peiresc, dated 16th August 1635, Rubens wrote: "The strong impression exercised on your sight by visible objects, seems to me to be derived rather from the effect of lines and the contours of bodies than from colours." This purely classic idea, coming from a supreme master of colour, is profoundly interesting. It explains why Rubens never allowed the romantic ideal, which was so strong in him, to run away with his sense of order and definition; it explains, or helps to explain, how he was able to combine perfect architecture in his work with the accidental play of light, to express both the essential structure of nature and the temporary moods which alter its appearance. This is never more clearly to be perceived than in his late landscapes.

The second reference is in a letter to Franz Junius, dated 1st August 1637. Rubens is commenting on a book by Junius, the *De Pictura Veterum libri III: accedit Catalogus, adhuc ineditus, architectorum, mechanicorum, sed præcipue pictorum, statuariae, cælatorum, tornatorum, aliorumque artificum et operum quæ fecerunt, secundum seriem literariam digestus incipiendo ab Aarone*, Amsterdam, 1637, in quarto, which appeared in English in 1638 and in Dutch in 1641. In a second Latin edition, published in 1694, at Rotterdam, Rubens's letter was included.

"To tell the truth," wrote Rubens, "I think you

have greatly honoured our art by excavating this immense treasure from all antiquity with so much care and arranging it in such good order. In fact, your book is, in a word, a rich depository of all the examples, references, and rules of our art scattered on all sides in the writings of the ancients, and preserved for us to our great profit. I believe, then, that you have fully justified your title *De Pictura Veterum*, and that you have attained your end in citing the advice, the laws, the judgements, and the example which help to clear up the question for us and in reproducing them with admirable erudition and in the most elegant style, in co-ordinating your work in the best way, in completing it to the smallest details with the greatest care. But now that we can, each after his taste and his talent, take example from the painting of the ancients, I very much wish that an equally careful work could be done on the Italian painters, who have left us examples and models which can still be seen by all, and can be, so to speak, pointed out with the finger and explained from the originals. For truly, what is perceived by the senses produces a grander and more lasting impression, demands a profounder examination, and furnishes a richer material for study than that which we perceive only in imagination and as we think, and which is obscured by words which we strive even three times to comprehend (as Orpheus did for Eurydice) and which often escape and deceive our hope. We speak of this from experience, for how few of us who wish to conceive of an eminent work by Apelles or

Thimantes described by Pliny or by some other author, will conceive anything masterly, or suitable to the majesty of ancient art. But each according to his own taste will drink some poor wine as first-class vintage and so affront these great artists."

The æsthetic of Rubens, then, must be deduced almost entirely from his own work; his letters will help us very little indeed. The task is a fascinating and glorious one, which, for all that has been written on him, has not yet, I think, been thoroughly done. The pantheistic philosophy of Rubens, as I understand it, remains to be explored; whether I shall dare to attempt that exploration, I do not know yet. Luckily for me, my present purpose is the more humble one of arraying facts and not of advancing theories; of presenting a man, and not of analysing his work. I wonder if I have succeeded in conveying anything of the magnificence of character which I feel to have been Rubens's.

SUTTON, SUSSEX, 1928

The Life of Sir Peter-Paul Rubens

CHAPTER I

MARIA PYPELINCKX

ON the 29th of November 1561, at the church of St James in Antwerp, Maria Pypelinckx was given in marriage to Jan Rubens. She was a girl of twenty-three, a native of the Campine, that desolate tract of moorland which stretches east from Antwerp towards the Meuse and which even the hard-fighting Flemish peasants have not yet entirely conquered. Her husband, although only thirty at the time of his marriage, was an esteemed advocate, endowed with the learning of Louvain and Padua, doctor *in utroque jure* in the University of Rome, and soon to become an Alderman of Antwerp; a most worthy, solid citizen and something of a pompous ass. He knew who were his ancestors; but in his character of Renaissance pedant and Italianised lawyer he could not have found great glory in their eminence as tanners, druggists, apothecaries, and grocers; but, no doubt, in his character of alderman, he consoled himself with remembering that they had been honest merchants, owners of real property, and their own masters. Of such, after all, was the city of Antwerp; and such, though they might have little Latin and no Greek, were much honoured there.

During the six years of his aldermanship Maria served him faithfully, bearing Jan-Baptist, Blandina, Clara, and Hendrik. In all things Jan Rubens would have prospered, but for an unexpected streak of nonconformity. Whether the blood of the grocers was too strong for him, or whatever else the cause may have been, he took up with the teachings of Calvin.

This was tactless in a country under Spanish rule. Antwerp, in the days of Charles V, had already produced sufficient Protestant martyrs to stop the spread of the new doctrine. But Philip II did not command the same authority in the Low Countries as his father; the Reformation began to move again, and to be supported by certain of the Flemish nobility, not from religious motives but in opposition to the King's exclusively Catholic and Spanish régime. The Governor of the Netherlands, Margaret of Parma, was unable to cope with the rising swarms of Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, and other sectaries. Five years after Maria's marriage the iconoclasts swept over the country, and their ruthless destruction supplied great opportunities for Maria's unborn son; it also stirred Philip of Spain to despatch the Duke of Alva with twenty thousand men and orders to suppress Protestantism. He arrived in August 1567. It was unlucky for Jan that his name appeared in the list of Calvinists drawn up by a Spanish partisan in 1566. He tried, with admirable prudence, to save the situation by sitting as a judge in trials for heresy. He must even have recanted publicly, since Brother-Minor Jean Porthaise, "theologal of the church of Poitiers," boasted of how he and two other priests, in a public disputation with a number of Lutherans, converted

“Monsieur Rubens, chief counsellor of Antwerp and the most learned Calvinist then in the Low Countries.”

The methods of the Duke of Alva to re-establish the true religion of Christ are sufficiently well known. His Council of Troubles, so ungraciously nicknamed the Council of Blood, established the principles of charity and humility by cutting off eighteen thousand heads. His soldiers convinced the ignorant Flemish of the superiority of the Spanish brand of morality by robbing them, burning down their houses, slaughtering their children, and raping their women.

The aldermen of Antwerp sought to justify their part in the religious risings, first to Margaret of Parma and then to Alva himself. Alva handed over the document for inquiry to Ludovico del Rio, the least gentle of his followers. The position was uncomfortable for Alderman Rubens. He sent to Counsellor Jan Gillis a memorandum to be laid before del Rio in which, at great length, he sought to prove that the accusation of heresy made against him was utterly false and founded on jealousy. The Burgomaster had already lost his head on a similar accusation, and despite equally good defences, which made Rubens suspect that the Council of Blood might not be properly impressed with the learning and cogency of his memorandum. He finally decided to trust to his legs rather than his Latinity.

In October 1568, protected by a certificate of respectability from the Chief Magistrate of Antwerp, Jan, with his wife and children, fled to Cologne, where he rented a house at two hundred and sixty-six thalers a year in front of the presbytery of St Martin. He had not won a heavenly crown, but he had saved his head;

for which Maria Pypelinckx, being a very faithful woman, was no doubt grateful. She would have been more grateful still had she realised that, by preserving his life, he was preserving the seed of Peter-Paul, which was worth a great deal more in a world where martyrs were cheap.

Jan, thinking he was now free of unpleasant possibilities, openly returned to Calvinism. But even in Cologne he was called to account and ordered to leave the town. Once more he prepared documents of self-defence, making much of the fact that he was employed by Her Most Serene Highness the Princess of Orange in her business and lawsuits, and as her confidential adviser and the guardian of her children. The town council, being duly impressed, granted him permission to remain in the city provided he furnished proofs of his orthodoxy before Michaelmas. Jan Rubens was not so foolish as to quibble and became a good Catholic forthwith.

But, for all his prudence, Jan seemed to have a knack of getting into trouble. His next escapade was as dangerous as Calvinism and a great deal less reputable.

Her Most Serene Highness Anne of Saxony, Princess of Orange, daughter of the Elector Maurice, while her husband was about his heroic business of freeing the Netherlands from Spanish oppression, passed the time in lechery and drink. Jan had been introduced to her by her legal adviser, a fellow fugitive, one Jan Betz of Malines, and was appointed his assistant. While Betz was away on business Rubens took his place. He rose rapidly into the confidence of the Princess. When she moved from Cologne to Siegen, in the Duchy of Nassau, about fifty miles west of Cologne, she left two children

in his charge. When he visited her at Siegen, she kept him to dinner.

Anne enjoyed a great reputation for ugliness, and Jan, as we know, for respectability; but then, after all, Anne was a Princess and respectable people overlook much in princesses. Anyway, Jan, not content with taking the place of Betz, took that of the Prince of Orange as well; with the startling result that on the 22nd of August 1571 Anne gave birth to a sickly child that could have had nothing to do with her husband. But rumour had been at work before this conclusive evidence, and by the orders of William of Orange and his brother, Count John of Nassau, Jan had been imprisoned in the castle of Dillenburg as early as March of that year. But once again he was to save his precious life, truly precious since Peter-Paul was still unborn. Although, under German law, death was the punishment for adultery, Rubens was to be spared, partly, no doubt, to avoid the public scandal against the family of Orange, but partly, also, because of Maria Pypelinckx.

Throughout the religious tergiversations of her husband, Maria had gone on quietly with her duties of wife and mother. We know nothing of her. We can only divine her faithful obedience. But now, at the age of thirty-three, an exile from her own country, she has to fight for herself, her husband, and her children. In that fight we discover the simple grandeur of her character; we understand the respect and love for her which her great son was always to display; we understand why such a learned and reverend man as Jan Brant should call her "*prudentissima et lectissima femina*"; and such another learned and reverend man as Jan Woverius, "*hanc supra sexum prudentem panæ*

supra matrem vestrorum amantem”; we understand a little, perhaps, how supreme genius and lofty nobility of character could spring from the loins of a weak-minded, cowardly, and pompous ass.

When first her husband disappeared, Maria bombarded Anne of Saxony with letters and messengers. Not for three weeks did she learn that her husband was in prison, in danger of death, and unfaithful to her. She immediately wrote him a letter of pardon. He, too, had written on the same day—the 28th of March—and when she received his letter on the 1st of April, she replied:

“MY DEAR AND BELOVED HUSBAND,—I have received your letter of the 1st of April and I see that you have a great desire to receive my news, which I was sure you would. That is why on the same day, 28th of March, on which you wrote to me, I sent you a long letter by a certain messenger, who went down thither with Raymond.¹ I hope you have received it, and that it has given you every satisfaction on the subject of the forgiveness you ask for, which I grant you now once again, and will ever grant you when you ask it of me, but on one condition—that you will love me as you used—without demanding any other satisfaction from you but the giving of that love, for if I have that, the rest cannot fail to follow. It gave me great joy to receive news of you for my heart was torn with uneasiness and anxiety at our being so far from one another. I had drawn up a petition, too, and I was very anxious for Raymond to undertake to send it in immediately, but he thought it would be better to wait until your messenger brought us some news. As

¹ Reymont Reyngodt, an apothecary and a relation of Maria.

soon as I know how your affairs go, I will beg him to go at once and present it in my name, which he will do, I hope. God grant it may have the effect I desire! But, alas! I have written it without art nor learning. I have simply expressed my desire as well as I could; for I have not told your story to a living soul, so that the secret may be kept on our side at least; and so I asked help of no one, but helped myself as best I could. That will suffice, I hope, if God grants us his grace and deigns to make our rulers have compassion on us, as I hope He will. Our little children pray two or three times a day for you that the Lord may bring you back to us very soon. As to explaining away your absence, it is too late for that, for it is very generally known where you are, not here only, but at Antwerp and everywhere; but no one knows why, and we explain it as we agreed with Raymond, and we give hopes that you will soon come home again, which has helped much to stop the gossip. I have written also as pertinently as I could to our relatives, who, like all our friends, have been plunged into the deepest grief by letters from other people, and will never be reassured till they hear the news of your return home. You advise me also in your letters to show no dismay nor sorrow, but that I have found quite impossible, for dismay and sorrow have never left me for an instant, and, as they say, feigning gladness in sadness is the worst of pain. However I do all I can, and as I never leave the house, I am little seen; and to the people who visit me I explain that my grief comes from the rumours that are spread about you. . . . And so I pray you to seek your consolation in the Lord, as I myself do, and to recommend yourself to Him. I have a sure hope that He will not condemn me to such a sad separation, for

the trial would be more cruel than I could bear with resignation. My heart is so sore that I greatly fear that cross would be too heavy for me; therefore I pray the Lord God to spare it me. I recommend you to Him; and the little children and I recommend ourselves to your good grace."

Before this letter was sent, Maria received another from her husband, which she immediately answered.

"DEAR AND BELOVED HUSBAND,—After I had written you the enclosed letter, the messenger we had sent to you arrived bringing me a letter from you, which gave me joy because I see from it that you are satisfied with my forgiveness. I never thought you would have believed that there would be any difficulty about that from me, for in truth I made none. How could I have the heart to be angry, with you in such peril, when I would give my life to save you if it were possible? And were it not so, how could so much hatred have succeeded so quickly to our long affection, as to make it impossible for me to pardon a slight trespass against myself, when I have to pray God to forgive me the many trespasses I commit against Him every day, assuring Him that I myself forgive them that have trespassed against me? I should be like the wicked steward whose master had forgiven him so many heavy debts, and who himself demanded that his brother should pay him a very small debt to the uttermost farthing. Be assured, then, that I have forgiven you completely. Please God that may suffice to set you free! We should soon have cause to rejoice; but I find nothing in your letter to console me, for it has broken my heart by showing me that you have lost

courage and speak as if you were on the point of death. I am so troubled that I know not what I am writing. One would think that I desired your death; since you ask me to accept it in expiation. Alas, how you hurt me by saying that! In truth it passes my endurance. If there is no more pity, where shall I find a refuge? Where must I seek it? I will ask it of Heaven with tears and cries. I hope still that the Lord will hear me, that He will soften the hearts of these princes, that they may hear our prayers and have pity upon me; if not they will surely kill me in putting you to death; for I should die of grief and my heart would cease to beat at the moment when I heard the fatal news. . . .

“My heart cannot bow to the idea that our sad and cruel separation can be final, for I looked for it so little on the day when you went away. My God! I could not survive it! My soul is so bound up and made one with yours, that you cannot suffer but I must suffer as much. Methinks if these good lords could see my tears they would have pity upon me, even were they of wood or stone, and therefore, were there no more hope, I should try this last resource, even should you write to me not to do so. Alas! it is not justice that we ask, it is pity, and if we can by no means obtain it, what shall we do! O heavenly Father, Father of mercy, deign to aid me! Thou desirest not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live! Oh! send forth Thy mercy upon the soul of these good lords, whom we have so heavily offended, that we may soon be delivered from this great pain and sorrow! For Thou seest how long it has endured. . . .

“Now I recommend you to the Lord, for I can write

no more, and I beg of you not to anticipate the worst: for that will anyhow come soon enough. To be always thinking of death, and dreading death is worse than death itself. Therefore, banish these thoughts from your heart. I hope and trust in God, that He may punish us more leniently, and that He may still give us both joy after all this grief. For this I beseech Him from the bottom of my heart, recommending you to the Almighty, that He may strengthen and comfort you with His Holy Spirit. I shall continually pray for you; and so also do our little children, who send their love and, who—God knows—long so much to see you.

“Written on this 1st April between midnight and one o’clock. No longer sign yourself ‘your unworthy husband,’ since I have forgiven you all.—Your faithful wife,
MARIA RUEBENS.”

There is grandeur and pathos in the picture of this distraught woman, *prudentissima et lectissima*, hiding her grief and masking the sullied honour of her husband by day; pouring out her love to him, consoling him, even sharing blame with him, by night, when her frightened children are in bed and she is alone. And at the other end—we can gather it from her letter—the learned lawyer, ex-alderman, and doctor *in utroque jure* had already lost courage. His greatest effort to save himself consisted in the prudent, if perhaps unchivalric, statement that it was all the fault of Anne. He probably spoke the truth when he said: “It must be presumed that I would never have had the hardihood to approach if I had feared refusal.”

Maria set to work, writing letter after letter, “without art nor learning,” to John of Nassau, to

William of Orange, to Juliana, his mother: she visited the Prince at Dillenburg, wrote again, visited him again, and, finally, in desperation, threatened to spread the whole story abroad to the dishonour of the house of Nassau.

After two years of this unremitting persistence, she won her husband's partial freedom. He was confined to the town of Siegen except when he chose to walk in the neighbouring country with one of the Prince's servants. Even this permission was subsequently withdrawn on various occasions, because the sight of him upset the tender susceptibilities of virtuous people. He was forbidden to appear in church, enter commerce, or practise law; and if any of these restrictions were disobeyed, he was to go back to prison and suffer the torture of the wheel. Maria went bail for him to the tune of six thousand thalers. On 10th May 1573 she at last received her husband in the little house she had prepared for him in Siegen.

But even now Maria did not rest. For another five years she sued for Jan's complete liberty. He himself drew up an address to John of Nassau, which his wife copied out for him. It was full of art and learning, and intolerably diffuse and bombastic. No doubt the simple Maria marvelled at his crowded references to Scripture, and Greek and Roman laws of adultery, his quotations from Pompey, Domitian, Augustus, Constantine, Justinian, and the rest; no doubt she heartily agreed with his panegyric of himself, in which he drew attention to his titles of doctor in civil and canon law; no doubt she was quite overwhelmed with his concluding argument that "a doctor, though only holding one diploma, can ask the hand of a baroness without her being humiliated by the demand"; although it is

not quite clear how that pardons a doctor, of however many diplomas, for getting a bastard on a Most Serene Highness.

At any rate, pardon was obtained at last, with the provisos that Jan did not live in the Count's possessions, nor the hereditary dominions of the Low Countries, that the six thousand thalers were confiscated, and that Jan was still subject to recall. Her Most Serene Highness, the cause of all the trouble, had died of drink in an asylum in 1578, where her serenity had been a good deal disturbed for some time.

In that year, the Rubens left Siegen, where, incidentally, they had been Lutherans, and settled once more in Cologne, in their old house in the Sternengasse, where Jan once more, after a decent interval, found it expedient to be Catholic. This was his final conviction.

Their early years in Cologne were hard. Their fortune had gone to heal the honour of Nassau; the fear of a possible recall hung over Jan's head. Maria set herself to keep a shop, which was an indignity for the wife of a doctor *in utroque jure*, who could marry a baroness, but it was not in Maria's character to worry overmuch about that. There was a large family to be kept.

In 1582 the honour of Nassau began to hurt again and Jan was recalled to Siegen. Once more, poor, harassed Maria intervened and cured the hurt with another dose of thalers. On 10th January 1583 a full pardon was granted to Jan, who set up again in his profession with all proper respectability. He was much esteemed by Prince Charles de Croy, who invited him to his wedding at Aix. But, alas! the new prosperity did not last long. On 1st May 1587 Dr Rubens died,

and the following year Maria returned to Antwerp with a certificate of irreproachable conduct from the authorities of Cologne.

During all these troubled years Maria had been serving her husband in other ways than those connected with his sordid adventure. She had added three sons to her family, of whom the last, Bartholomeus, died while still an infant. Clara had died before her father's disgrace, and Hendrik at Cologne in the year of his father's pardon. Jan-Baptist, the first-born, had already left Cologne to carry on his studies in Italy. Maria, therefore, took three children with her to Antwerp: Blandina, who was to marry Simeon du Parcq in 1590 and to die in 1609, and the two youngest survivors. One of these was Philip, born in 1574 at Cologne, the other, Peter-Paul, born at Siegen on 28th June 1577. In the days of her exile, under the shadow of imprisonment and disgrace, Maria Pypelinckx had brought immortality to a pompous ass and accomplished her own splendid destiny. She was faithful to the end. The world never knew of the blemish on the name that her children bore. Somehow—*prudentissima et lectissima femina*—she had obtained on the certificate she brought from Cologne the statement that she and her husband had lived continuously at Cologne from 1569 to 1587. In a final gesture of magnanimity she inscribed on his tomb in the church of St Peter, for which her son was afterwards to paint the *Crucifixion of St Peter* which still hangs there, a most eulogistic epitaph stating that Jan Rubens had taken refuge in Cologne and lived there until his death, that he had had seven children, and that she, Maria Pypelinckx, his wife, "with whom he had lived twenty-six years in concord without giving her any cause of complaint, had ordered this tomb to be

erected to the honour of her excellent and well-loved husband."

Having rendered this last faithful service to her husband, Maria Pypelinckx devoted herself exclusively to the service of her children.

CHAPTER II

YOUTH

PETER-PAUL RUBENS, then, had been born on 28th June 1577, at Siegen, in the county of Siegen, in the extreme south of Westphalia. It was a little hill town, enclosed by walls which bristled with round towers that had conical tops like pepper-pots, and it contained an unconscionable number of churches. On three sides were comfortable hills, and on the fourth, a few fields away, flowed the river Sieg. Uncertain tradition points to a house in the Bourgstrasse, the cobbled street that climbs from the market-place to the castle, as Rubens's birthplace.

The Rubens family, on their arrival in Antwerp, settled at St Arnold's in the Meir. Maria had contrived so far to recover the family possessions as to be able to afford this considerable house. In 1601 she moved to the Kloosterstraat, where she lived till her death.

Peter-Paul, now eleven years of age, was sent to a school kept by Rumoldus Verdonck, "*pietatis et doctrinæ laude celebris ludimagister latinus*," an excellent gentleman who devoted himself for fifty-two years to teaching Latin, first in Lierre and afterwards in Antwerp, and who died full of respectability in 1620. His school was situated near the cemetery of Notre-Dame, behind the choir of the church.

At this school Peter-Paul made friends with Balthasar Moretus, son of Jan, and grandson of Christophe Plantin, the founder of the Plantin Press, of which Balthasar was to become director and for which Peter-Paul was to paint a series of decorative portraits. On his way to school, Peter-Paul passed the Moretus' house in the Kammerstraat and the two little boys walked on together. In a letter to Philip Rubens, written some years later, Balthasar observed: "I have known your brother since his childhood, at school, and I loved that young man for his intelligent and most amiable character."

Peter-Paul did not stay long at Verdonck's, where, in his spare time, he had copied the illustrations in Tobias Stimmer's bible. When he was something over thirteen he entered the service of Marguerite de Ligne-Arenberg, the widow of Philip, Comte de Lalaing, lord of the county of Escornaix, baron de Wavre, captain-general and grand-bailiff of Hainault. Master Peter-Paul was only a page to the relict of so much distinction. He learnt what he needed of good manners and stately address in the little court which she held at Audenarde, and learnt it quickly too. Within a year, disgusted by the life of petty luxury and aimless frivolity, he was back in Antwerp with his mother. But only to move on again soon, this time to the house of his first master in painting, Tobias Verhaecht. So Maria Pypelinckx was left alone. She had set her children up in the world, for Philip was secretary to Jean Richardot, a Councillor of State and later Chief-President of the Privy Council, and he lived, therefore, in Brussels.

Peter-Paul was by now remarkably equipped in learning. From his father, from a Jesuit school in

Cologne, from Verdonck's, he had acquired a deep knowledge of Latin, which he afterwards employed in his letters with a considerable elegance. From the same sources, perhaps, and from the court of Marguerite de Ligne, he had learnt French, which language, too, he could write perfectly. He had naturally learnt German as a child. His well-trained mind was soon able to acquire Italian and Spanish, which he later wrote and spoke freely. In true Renaissance fashion he neglected the tongue of his country. He really wrote Flemish badly, but no worse than most of his learned contemporaries.

He had now determined to become an artist. Maria, who had designed that he should enter the law, still humbly believing herself without art nor learning, did not venture to approve such a step alone. She summoned a family council. Peter-Paul, with all the surprising wisdom of his fourteen years and with the courtly grace that had come so naturally to him, set forth his ambitions in glowing eloquence and won over the gathering of worthy bourgeois. He was forthwith apprenticed to a relative by marriage, Tobias Verhaecht, an Italianised, conventional painter, well thought of in those poor days of Flemish art. Peter-Paul, very soon realising that he could not get what he wanted there, quitted his studio for that of Adam van Noort. Van Noort was a popular and expensive master, as fashionable in his day as he is forgotten now, another Italianised academic. Peter-Paul learnt from him the rudiments of his art, but, if legend is to be believed, the learning cannot have been very pleasant. Van Noort is given out as a drunkard and a coarse brute. Better, though, to leave him in his oblivion, with the one claim

to remembrance that he was the master of Rubens and the master and father-in-law of Jordaens.

Peter-Paul's next master was his best. Otho Vaenius, born Van Veen, under whom he studied for the last four years of the century, was a Dutchman, the son of Cornelis van Veen, knight, Lord of Hoogeven, Desplasse, Vuerse, and Drookensteyn, and descended from a bastard of John III, Duke of Brabant. He had been settled in Antwerp some four years. He was a courtly and travelled man, learned in art and science, engineer and painter to the Court of Spain, a man of taste, a poet in several languages, rich and handsome, and an elegant cavalier—an admirable prototype of his great pupil. Peter-Paul helped him on the decorations of Antwerp for the triumphal entry of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella in 1599, as he himself was to be helped by so many when he did a like work for their successor thirty-six years later. From him he learnt that enthusiasm for Italy which made him, like most of his fellow-painters, at last set off for the South. He had taken all he could from Flanders and had been a master of the Guild of St Luke, the painters' guild, for two years. On 8th May 1600 he obtained from the Burgomaster and Aldermen of Antwerp a certificate of good health "seeing that he himself, as all this city, is exempt by the grace of God from all plague or other contagion." On the next day he said good-bye to his mother whom he was never to see again. She sacrificed him to his art; and with proud and simple remembrance she wrote in her will, six years later: "I give to my two sons the cooking utensils and everything else as they are at

present, as well as all the books, papers, and writings belonging to me, with the pictures in my possession which are only portraits; the other pictures, which are beautiful, belong to Peter-Paul, who painted them."

CHAPTER III

ITALY

RUBENS, with his companion and pupil, Deodate del Monte, arrived in Venice towards the end of July. There he fell in with a noble Mantuan, who was much taken with him and his works, and immediately introduced him to the Duke.

Vincenzo de Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua and Monferrato, was one of the petty independent sovereigns of Northern Italy, whose independence needed a great deal of looking after, and whose method of looking after it was strictly Machiavellian. He was at this time thirty-eight years old, and fancied himself considerably as a sumptuous and elegant prince and as a patron of the arts, in the old Renaissance style. In appearance he was curiously like Rubens, except that his chestnut-coloured hair was thinner on top than the painter's. He wore a neat beard and full moustache, with very little hair on the cheeks. It seems that Rubens modelled his coiffure and general air of the dashing cavalier on this handsome master.

Gonzaga had the usual exalted connections. His mother was a daughter of the Emperor Ferdinand I; his first wife, Margarita, a Farnese of the royal house of Parma; his second wife, a Medici, sister to the future Queen of France. There had been a truly comic affair in connection with this second marriage. His divorce

from his first wife had raised a suspicion of his manly capabilities. Before the completion of his second marriage contract he had been called upon to disprove that suspicion. This he had satisfactorily done in Venice before witnesses on a specially selected virgin. The ecclesiastical authorities had given their full approval to the experiment, provided it were not performed on a Friday.

Gonzaga lived well over his income, which he made as large as possible by whatever means occurred to his ingenuity, and, as Rubens wrote many years later, "wasted the fortunes of his subjects, breaking them with exactions and heavy taxes." He gambled and loved many women, patronised music in the person of Monteverdi, science in that of Galileo, and painting in that of Rubens. His agents bought masterpieces all over Italy, or ordered copies to be made of those that could not be bought. He collected antique sculpture, Chinese *objets d'art*, Flemish tapestries, musical instruments from Cremona, and Dutch tulips. He employed German engravers, weavers and silk embroiderers, and a permanent troupe of actors, the famous Gelosi. He had passions for astrology and miraculous images of the Virgin, horses, hunting, carnivals, good food, sexual intrigues, lions, tigers, and crocodiles, wars, and shows of every kind.

This versatile prince owned two important residences. One was the Palazzo Vecchio, of fourteenth century origins, decorated by Mantegna, Lorenzo Costa, Perugino, and Giulio Romano,¹ with terraced gardens, tilting-ground, artificial lake, vast suites of rooms, colossal halls, galleries, and loggias, all frescoed or

¹ One room of this palace is reproduced in a model at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

decorated with marble and sculpture after Pinturicchio : the other the Palazzo del Te, a late Renaissance structure, decorated by Giulio Romano, Primaticcio, and Luca da Faenza.

Gonzaga, somewhat impressed with the work of Rubens, took him into service along with the astrologers and the crocodiles. He was the second Fleming in his collection. The one already there, was referred to quite indistinguishably as Jan. Frans Pourbus was acquired in August of the same year as Rubens.

During the autumn Rubens was in Mantua, tasting the life of a court somewhat grander than that of Marguerite de Ligne, and disliking it less because he was a court-painter and not a page. His work, however trivial and overseen, was at least painting. Besides there were great pictures to study, and this was Italy, the Promised Land.

At the beginning of October he went to Florence in Gonzaga's train. The occasion was of great importance to that prince; he was to assist at the marriage by proxy of his sister-in-law, Maria de' Medici, daughter of Francesco I, Grand Duke of Tuscany, to Henri IV, King of France. The ceremony took place on 6th October in the church of Santa Maria dei Fiore. Henri IV was represented by the Sieur Henri de Bellegarde and the Marquis de Sillery. Mass was said by Cardinal Aldobrandini, a papal nephew. After the gospel he went to the right side of the altar and seated himself under a canopy of cloth of gold. De Bellegarde, who bore the procuration charging the Grand Duke of Tuscany to marry Maria de' Medici in the name of Henri IV, fetched her from where she sat under another canopy with her father, and conducted her to the right hand

of the cardinal. Then the Grand Duke presented the procuration to be read by two prelates; after which the marriage was celebrated to the accompaniment of guns.

Rubens was present at this setting to partners of prelates and lords and queens, which was lucky, since he was to be called upon, years later, to paint the scene for the Medici Gallery. He was present, too, at the ball and at the supper which followed, when he was delighted by the singing of a lady dressed as Minerva, accompanied by another dressed as Iris; probably he was present, too, at the further festivities of the next three days, the hunts, the tournaments, and the races, and at the departure of the Queen, on the 13th, accompanied by the Grand Duchess of Tuscany, the Duchess of Mantua, Antonio her brother, the Duke of Bracciano, and the Sieur de Bellegarde. It was a good introduction to magnificence for one who was to be the friend of kings and princes, and himself counted as a prince.

In the summer of 1601 Rubens went to Rome. It appears from a letter which he received from his brother Philip, shortly after his arrival there, that he had already travelled considerably. "What I want to hear from you," said Philip, "is what you think of that city (Rome), and the other cities of Italy, most of which you have seen." Rubens carried to Rome with him a letter from Gonzaga to Cardinal Montalto, another papal nephew, who, with Aldobrandini, conducted the political affairs of the Holy See. Gonzaga wrote that he was sending Peter-Paul, a Fleming, his painter, to copy certain pictures, and that he begged for him the protection of His Eminence which would augment the infinite obligations he already owed him. He,

Gonzaga, was off to the wars in Croatia to display once more his gorgeously equipped troops and, incidentally, to keep in with the Emperor. This letter was dated 18th July. A month later His Eminence wrote to the Duke that he had received the Fleming, Peter-Paul, and would give him every possible assistance in the service of His Highness, which he always considered vastly more important than his own.

Rubens, duly delivered in Rome, presented himself to Lelio Arrigoni and drew fifty crowns on account of the hundred which Arrigoni was ordered to pay him whenever he required money. This Arrigoni was Gonzaga's representative at the papal court, an extremely difficult position, since his master was by no means favoured in Rome. When he had first presented himself to the Pope, and, having duly kissed his feet, had thanked him for the entire tranquillity of Gonzaga's conscience, His Holiness, while modestly admitting his part in that blessed spiritual state, had suggested that Arrigoni might warn His Highness against the perfidy of Jews. Since His Highness was usually in some embarrassment with those gentlemen, this was a score for His Holiness and a difficult message for Arrigoni to deliver to his master.

The Rome to which Rubens had come was no longer the centre of art in fact, though it remained so in reputation. It was true that he could study there the work of great masters, but he could only know personally such men as the Caracci, Guido Reni, and Caravaggio. Michelangelo, the last of the Italian giants, had died seven years before.

*" Roma dole : vicit nostro Rubenius ævo
Aduatica latiam dexteritate manum "*

("Weep, O Rome, for in our days Rubens, the Fleming, triumphs over Latium in the skill of his hand"), Antonius Sanderus, the learned penitentiary of Ypres, was to exclaim twenty years later.

Rubens now filled his time humbly copying the old masters. He carried out, however, one important work of his own, an altar-piece for the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. This had been ordered from him by the Archduke Albert, Sovereign of the Netherlands, late cardinal of that church, and one day to be his master. Arrigoni obtained permission for Rubens to do this work, and Richardot for him to remain in Rome until its completion, although Gonzaga had recalled him. This Richardot was a son of Philip Rubens's employer, and had acted as intermediary between Rubens and the Archduke. Rubens eventually returned to Mantua in the April of 1602, where he continued to work for the Duke, and where he advised him in the selection of pictures at Rome to be copied.

In July he met his brother Philip and Jan Woverius at Verona. Woverius was, like the Rubenses, the son of an Antwerp alderman. At Louvain he had studied under the famous professor, Justus Lipsius, where he had met Philip, who was two years his senior. They had become close friends, but since leaving Louvain had been far apart. Woverius had been in Paris and Seville, and Philip, who had gone to Louvain with his pupils, Guillaume and Antoine Richardot, sons of his master, the Chief-President, had returned to Brussels for a time, and then set off bear-leading Guillaume in Italy. Philip was by this time an extremely distinguished classical scholar. In later years he was offered the Chair

of Louvain in succession to the world-renowned Lipsius, but his classical passion drew him to Italy, and he preferred the post of librarian and secretary to Cardinal Ascanio Colonna. Woverius wrote of him to Lipsius: *Liberale ingenium est, et ad optima quoque factum.*

The gathering at Verona must have been a most happy occasion. The two brothers, like the two friends, had been long separated, and Peter-Paul must have been delighted to meet Woverius, a learned man, a compatriot, and Philip's friend. It must be hoped that they did not spend all their time—some three or four days—in the elaborate latinity and interminable compliments of their letters; it must be hoped that Peter-Paul and Philip exchanged some intimate remembrances of their childhood and of Maria Pypel-inckx; that Woverius and Philip had other discourse besides panegyric of the learning of Lipsius; that all three pledged their friendship more worthily than in phrases. Alas! that the letters of these seventeenth-century scholars are designed to show off their Latin rather than their feelings, and to immortalise their powers of quotation rather than their daily lives. We know that Philip did once venture to the carnival at Venice. In one of his letters he defended that levity with a spate of classical precedent.

It appears that for some time Peter-Paul entertained Guillaume Richardot at Mantua. This can be gathered from Philip's letter to his brother of 15th July. The letter is peculiarly obscure, couched in the laconic Latin, full of turns of phrase far-sought in the literature of decadent Rome, on which Philip prided himself. It is a wearisome exhortation to hospitality with mythological illustrations of

that virtue. Presumably Peter-Paul understood the letter. The mother "without art nor learning" had done well by her sons, as doing well was then understood, and she had not thrown pearls before swine.

CHAPTER IV

SPAIN

It has been said that the independence of Mantua needed a great deal of looking after. It did. All around it were jealous neighbours, great and small. Spain now ruled in Naples, Sicily, Milan, and Sardinia; Venice, Tuscany, Parma, Genoa, Savoy, and the Pope were all given to expansion. Neither the Holy Roman Empire nor France would have neglected the opportunity of snapping up any weak, unsupported state. It was the business, therefore, of the ruler of such a state not to be unsupported, but to play off one rivalry against another, and to help others that they might themselves be helped. Such a ruler was Gonzaga, and we have already seen him rallying to the Emperor in Croatia. He was happily related to the ruling houses of Tuscany and France; he had, through the medium of Arrigoni, mollified papal suspicion of Jewry. Spain, therefore, was his greatest danger. Although the new king, Philip III, was less imperial minded than his predecessor, he maintained his policy of acquisition in Italy. Moreover, he had allowed the power of government to lapse into the hands of his First Minister, Don Francisco de Sandoval y Rojas, Marquis of Denia, Duke of Lerma, who was, in the manner of favourites, insatiable. Being as incompetent as he was arrogant, he carried on government

by a complex system of spies, which made life uncomfortable in such states as Mantua. Petty princes had to mind their P's and Q's when the arras had Spanish ears.

Not only did Gonzaga wish to be well with Spain for these general reasons; he was also, at this moment, a candidate for the office of Admiral in the Spanish service, now vacant because of the disgrace of the late Admiral, Giovanni Andrea Doria di Genova. He therefore decided on the common, if somewhat unsubtle, course of sending presents. He chose Rubens to conduct the mission. It was a delicate one, and his choice shows that he had taken note of the diplomatic qualities and personal charm of his painter.

The presents Rubens was to carry were these: for the King, a coach and seven bay horses, eleven arquebuses of fine steel, fitted with ingenious contrivances, six with whalebone and five rifled, and a rock-crystal vase filled with perfumes, which, Gonzaga suggested, His Majesty would no doubt use to give flavour to his drinking water; for the Duke of Lerma, many paintings, a large silver vase ornamented with figures and also filled with perfumes, and two gold vases; for the Countess of Lemos, Lerma's sister, a cross containing a relic, and two candlesticks in rock-crystal for her private altar, which, Gonzaga hoped, would remind her to pray for him; for Don Pedro Franqueza, Count of Villalonga, son of an enfranchised slave and Lerma's creature, two vases of rock-crystal and a wall-hanging of yellow and crimson damask patterned with cloth of gold; for the Director of the Chapel Royal, a thousand reals. The paintings to be given to Lerma were mostly copies, and included some sixteen after

Raphael by Gonzaga's agent in Rome, Pietro Facchetti, a Mantuan.

Rubens, then, was charged to carry these precious and somewhat cumbersome objects to Spain, and to bring back portraits of the court beauties, a task which Gonzaga delighted to set his painters. There may also have been some secret mission connected with a proposed marriage between a Gonzaga and a princess of Spain. There were letters to be delivered to Lerma, the Countess of Lemos, and Don Pedro Franqueza.

"We have not judged it proper to write to His Majesty the King on so trivial an occasion," the Duke of Mantua explained in his letter of instructions to Annibal Iberti, his representative in Spain; the truth being that he knew His Majesty was too lazy ever to read letters.

On 5th March 1603 Rubens obtained his passport. He arrived in Florence ten days later. The following letters, all written in excellent Italian to the Count Annibale Chieppio, secretary to Gonzaga, give an exact account of his journey.

"MY MOST ILLUSTRIOUS SIR AND HONOURABLE MASTER,—It is, in the first place, in obedience to the express command of His Serene Highness that I should report on my journey stage by stage, and in the second because I am forced to it by an important circumstance, that I am resolved to trouble you—you rather than any other. I am so full of confidence in your goodness and your courtesy, that I know that, even in the vast ocean of your numerous important affairs, you will not disdain to concern yourself with my little bark, which has been so badly guided up to the present by

stupid advice. I venture to state this, not to incriminate another or to excuse myself, but so that His Highness may learn how he will suffer through the mistake of a third party.

"I arrived in Florence on 15th March. The cost of transporting the baggage, particularly the coach, over the Alps, was considerable, as I shall explain to you later. I presented letters from Signor Cosimo Gianfilliaci to Signor Capponi, and others to Signor Piero Bonsi; these are the two most important merchants in the town. When they had grasped the situation, they were astounded and ready to drop with surprise at the mistake that had been made; they said that we should have gone to Genoa to embark, and not have taken the foolhardy risk of this detour towards Leghorn, without having previous notification of a sailing. Everyone tells me that I might have to wait there three or four months and then, after all that delay, have to go to Genoa in the end.

"The next day some merchants chanced to arrive direct from Genoa, who told me that there were galleys there ready to start, and, further, that a ship sailing for Alicante would wait there another eight or ten days. Therefore, on the advice of these Florentines and Genoese, I have decided to set out as soon as possible for Leghorn and embark at once for Genoa. God grant that I may arrive there in time, which I hope to do under the protection of the good genius of our Prince. I shall not fail to make all possible speed; I should indeed be already on the way if I were not detained by the coach, which has not yet arrived; that is thanks to the oxen who draw it instead of mules.¹ I am also held up by our crate-affair, which was

¹ It was mounted on a lorry.

specially made at Mantua and brought here only to be greeted with the mockery of the muleteers, who say that, even if it were absolutely empty, it would exceed the weight which our animals could draw. The coach alone, without the seven animals, cost forty ducats to convey from Bologna to Florence, though the price was fixed with the valuable assistance of Signor Andrea de Rossi and other merchants who were most friendly and helpful to us. This was due to the letters of Signor Cosimo, who also obtained for us the assistance of Signor Martellino at Ferrara. Signor Count Balthasar Langosco also did good service for the Duke in that town by interceding with the Lord Cardinal to protect us from the importunities of the tax-collectors who wanted at all costs to open our crates. His Eminence not only deigned to guarantee us against their violent proceedings, but also, even exceeding the scope of our application, he freed us from all trouble and all expense. This good example no doubt bore fruit in Bologna, for the taxing officers there were contented with a suitable gratuity. I hope that they will be the same in Florence, although the Grand Duke is away in Leghorn. It is no small thing to be exempt from the gabelles; if they had to be paid—and I am apprehensive about Spain—they would cost more than the whole voyage, as witness the account for taxes at Ferrara which amounted to a hundred and fifty scudi. Already the expenses far exceed the narrow limits which the Master of the Household and others pettily laid down. I shall do what I can; it is His Highness the Duke who takes the risks, not I. Did he distrust me? In that case he gave me a great deal of money. Did he trust me? In that case I have little. If funds run out—I hope I may not have the experience—

what damage will result to his reputation! If he gives me more than I need, it is certain that he runs no risk; I shall always be able to submit my accounts to examination, however severe. Will what remains not be returned to him just because he had trusted it to me in advance? And what a loss of prestige and of time.

“And here I am making you lose time with this long and troublesome letter. I am falling into an equally great error in letting myself be carried away by my feelings, which are perhaps too free and too violent for a correspondence with one of your station. May your goodness pardon me and your wisdom supply my defects. I beg and pray you to inform His Highness of what you please in this letter and of what seem to you my necessities. And if my complaints and importunities should not be presented with such vigour and such emphasis, I submit myself entirely to your experienced judgment. Speak and act as you will, dispose of your servant who bows to your patronage, humbly kissing your hand.—Your illustrious lordship’s most affectionate servant, PETER-PAUL RUEBENS.

“Whatever happens, I earnestly desire, if you can possibly obtain it, a letter for Genoa addressed to some agent or some gentleman who is friendly with His Highness the Duke.

“From Florence, the 18th March 1603.”

Rubens’s honesty and uprightness of character is evidenced in this, the first letter we have from him, because, despite the courtly periphrasis he uses, his true meaning and feelings are easily read between the lines. His opinion of ducal finance and administration is barely clothed with politeness. He thrusts keenly

at the Duke through the Master of the Household and the unknown fool who had sent him by Ferrara to Bologna, and from there over the Apennines to Florence, which, anyway, is not on the route from Mantua to Spain. He was going to Birmingham by way of Beachy Head.

“TO MY MOST ILLUSTRIOUS AND HONOURABLE LORD. —I hope that the advise given us by Signor Cosimo will help us to succeed better than was generally believed in Florence. Whether the mistake was the effect of fate or of some accident, is no matter; we need seek no other cause. The coach, being a little delayed by floods and other obstructions, I was kept in Florence six days longer, so that I have taken ten days over this insignificant journey. At last arrived in Pisa with my goods, my horses and my men safe and sound, I went in the evening to Leghorn, where I found two or three ships from Hamburg, which had been chartered by the Grand Duke to bring corn, and are now ready to pick up a cargo for Spain. The opportunity suited me, and I treated with one of the captains. Having come to an agreement, I hoped to embark at once, when the Grand Duke intervened by shipping a similar freight of corn for Naples. Seeing the first ship taken from me, I negotiated for the second, and I do not doubt but that I shall arrange matters; however, the decision is in abeyance as the captain has as yet no cargo. I shall know to-morrow.

“I have not yet presented myself to the Grand Duke, nor even to Don Virginio: ¹ in the first place, because

¹ Virginio Orsini, Duke of Bracciano, and nephew to the Grand Duke.

I have neither letters nor orders from His Serene Highness, nor has there been up to now the opportunity or the necessity of troubling either of them; and in the second place, because I do not wish to appear to be fishing for them to exempt the horses or provide a passage, which the Grand Duke has done for a great many, as I have heard and seen. He is very well informed about everything, according to certain acquaintances of mine at this court; and this evening he sent a Flemish gentleman,¹ who is in his service, to ask me to take one of his palfreys with my horses. He intends it for somebody or other at Carthage.

“I undertook the mission with the greatest possible enthusiasm; I offered my services, and those of a stable-boy to look after the animal, etc. The gentleman was delighted, giving as excuse for troubling me the cost of sending the horse by other agents.

“That is the history of our voyage so far. Forgive me for tiring your ears with such trivialities, when I know they are occupied with more important things, and for retailing to you all these uninteresting details. I conclude by kissing your hands respectfully, etc.,

“PETER-PAUL RUEBENS.

“From Pisa, the 26th March 1603.”

“MY MOST ILLUSTRIOUS AND HONOURABLE SIR,—This very day I have discussed and concluded the arrangement for a passage to Spain with that Captain from Hamburg, who, as I wrote you, is now at Leghorn. I hope, then, with the grace of God, to sail on the third day of the festival.² The Grand Duke sent

¹ Jan van Neesen, a native of Antwerp.

² Easter.

for me to-day after dinner. He was most friendly and courteous towards Their Serene Highnesses; and while inquiring with considerable curiosity about my journey and about me personally, he amazed me by showing how minutely he was informed on the quantity and quality of the presents and for whom they were intended; he further told me, much to the satisfaction of my pride, who I was and what my country, my profession, and my station. I was stupefied, and suspected the influence of some familiar spirit, or the excellent correspondence of the reporters, not to say spies, who are in our Prince's palace. There must be some such explanation, for I have not specified my baggage, neither at the customs nor elsewhere. Perhaps, also, my simplicity makes me marvel at things which are common in courts. Forgive me, and read as a pastime the news which is sent you by an inexperienced novice, taking count only of my good intentions to serve my masters and particularly your illustrious lordship.—Your Illustrious, etc.,

“PETER-PAUL RUEBENS.

“From Pisa, 29th March 1603.”

It was not really very surprising that the Grand Duke Ferdinand was so well informed. His relationships with Spain were at the moment extremely difficult, and he made it his business to know what was going on. It has even been suggested that Gonzaga's mission was part of a large political programme which Ferdinand had conceived. He was, after all, Gonzaga's uncle, and more powerful than him. Moreover, having been a cardinal since the age of fourteen, and trained in the political methods of Rome, he did not let much escape him. His spy

system was most efficient and notorious. It is conceivable that Rubens's letter was ironical. He was not one to refer to familiar spirits and mean it.

“TO MY MOST ILLUSTRIOUS AND HONOURABLE LORD.—It seems to me that I have been successful so far in my share of the journey; the Lord God will do the rest. The horses, the men, and the baggage are embarked; we want nothing but a favourable wind, which we hourly expect. We have shipped provisions for a month and paid the passage; in fact, everything is arranged to perfection thanks to the good help I had from Signor Dario Thamagno, who is the chief merchant in Leghorn, though a native of Florence, and who has a great affection for His Highness the Duke and is also a friend of Signor Cosimo. It would gratify me if His Highness, either on his way out or back through here, would be pleased to honour him with a friendly look or some little approving speech. He aspires to honours and feeds himself on the smoke of courts, and he will learn from that that I have made a faithful report of the services he has rendered us. The money which His Highness has had sent to me, much to the disgruntlement of those who censure my journey, will not be sufficient to cover our expenses from Alicante to Madrid, without counting the taxes, the gabelles or any accident that may happen. Signor Cosimo told me that it was only a matter of three or four days travelling, and I find that it is really more than two hundred and eighty miles; and out of consideration for our little horses we cover a very short distance in a day. Only just over a hundred ducats is left of the money supplied by His Highness; however, it is of no consequence whether that is sufficient,

because I can use the money which the Duke gave me for myself. I do not wish anyone to suspect me of carelessness or indiscreet spending; my accounts, which have been kept with perfect accuracy, will satisfactorily prove that such is not the case.

“I should not trouble you with all this business, which must be even more wearisome to you than it is to me, if I were not urged, nay, forced, to do so by the remembrance of what His Highness said many times, and by the remembrance, also, of that crowd of busybodies and great experts who meddled with our affairs, and who, in a chorus of ecstatic admiration at the liberality of the Duke, asserted that the sum granted far exceeded the cost of such a poor little journey. They asserted, furthermore, that all possible accidents and eventualities had been foreseen even to the amount of the taxes. And according to them it would not be fitting the prestige of His Highness to avoid payment or ask for exemption. That is all very well; but I believe that I have preserved our dignity in this as in all things, even the least important. I swear to you now, on the faith of my good service to His Serene Highness and to you, illustrious Sir, in particular, that, by the grace of God, we have suffered no serious accident. We have, on the contrary, had very good luck in getting a convenient and prompt passage, in enjoying exemption from all gabelles, by the quite spontaneous generosity of the authorities, and in only having to pay the lightest gratuities to the customs officers. The salaries for my men are sufficient; they have been fixed at so much a day according to an agreement arrived at in Mantua. The expense of the horses is considerable but necessary, for it includes baths of wine and other costly attentions. The travelling ex-

penses, as may be seen from the accounts, have been advantageously settled by contracts kindly drawn up by Martellino at Ferrara, Rossi at Bologna, Capponi and Bonsi at Florence, who also changed money for me, and by Riccardi at Pisa. The chartering of the ship—which was the most important—and the supplying of the provisions were most efficiently arranged by Signor Dario Thamango, and we have had the good fortune to meet here three empty ships waiting for cargoes to Alicante. In fact, where the service of His Highness the Duke was involved, we have acted like merchants, and yet, with all that, the expense is as great as I have stated. The Grand Duke has entrusted me with his palfrey, which I must offer to Don Giovan de Vich, His Catholic Majesty's captain at Alicante, together with a very beautiful marble table.

“I have nothing more to say to you at the moment; I will write further from Spain. I beg you to be so good as to render an account of all this to His Highness or to ask him to read my letter that His Highness may banish from his mind all vain ideas of the expenses of the voyage which are really very heavy.¹

“I will maintain this before all the world. In conclusion I pray you hold me in your good graces, and preserve for me those of His Serene Highness to which I pretend a right, not by my merit, but by the pure and sincere affection I bear him.—Your illustrious, etc.,

“PETER-PAUL RUEBENS.

“From Leghorn, the 2nd April 1603.”

¹ In the margin.—“It would be better for me that you report to him. In certain places my letter exceeds the limits of modesty and of the respect I owe His Serene Highness. In any case I submit to your discretion as the one who is my sole patron at the court after Their Highnesses.”

The following letter to Van der Neesen, the Flemish gentleman whom the Grand Duke had sent to Rubens about the palfrey, records Rubens's arrival in Spain.

"MY MOST WORTHY SIR,—By the grace of God I have arrived safe and sound with my baggage, horses, and men, and I have immediately done the little I had to do in the service of the Grand Duke. I have handed over the letters and the horse fully equipped, with nothing missing of any sort, to Signor Lomis Pasquall, Lieutenant to Signor Don Giovanni, the latter being away from Valencia. I have placed the other letter in the hands of Signor Lorenzo de Puigmolti, notary of the Holy Office. He has placed himself at my service and at that of the ships' captains, who are most obliged to him, and beg me to inform you of the kindness which they have received from him. Therefore, please convey this to the Grand Duke, and thank him most fervently for his favours; and do the same on my behalf with all possible sincerity. I shall be most beholden to you, and I trust I shall find an opportunity of rendering you a return service. —Your illustrious, etc., PETER-PAUL RUEBENS.
"The 22nd April in the year 1603. At Alicante."

The journey from Alicante to Valladolid, a distance of about three hundred and twenty English miles as the crow flies, took twenty days. This does not seem an excessive time. The country that had to be crossed was arid and mountainous, and it rained and blew furiously all the time. Besides, Rubens stopped for a time in Madrid to look at the pictures, and we may be sure he was not contented with an American view.

It is possible that he was accompanied on this stage by Don Giovanni de Vich, who certainly made the journey about the same time; and both parties would have been glad of an increase of strength for crossing the wild and bandit-haunted passes.

There is no obvious reason why Rubens, in order to reach Valladolid from Leghorn, had sailed south to Alicante, making almost as fantastic a detour as he had done in Italy. Possibly he did not know, when he planned the crossing, exactly where the King was, or possibly the captain of his ship had a freight to collect in the southern port and demanded an excessive price for going out of his way to touch at a northern port.

It was the 13th May when Rubens arrived in Valladolid, bringing with him the crystals and a crate of clothes which had been carried on pack-mules. The rest of his baggage was following him. He presented himself to Annibal Iberti, Gonzaga's resident in Spain. Iberti, according to one Domitio Perone, an agent of the Grand Duke's, was a man of fifty at this time, well versed in Spanish politics, very pedantic, and given to treating the most petty affairs with tremendous gravity. He was disliked at court because he had swollen from sycophancy to peevish arrogance. At first he had called himself a secretary, then he had insinuated that he was a nobleman, and finally he did not refuse the title of ambassador. However, he received Rubens with an appearance of courtesy, lodged him near his own house, and provided him with money for new clothes; the providing of money he did with least good grace. He insisted that he had no orders from Gonzaga in the matter, and he was probably well aware of the difficulty of getting repayment. Rubens, how-

ever, overcame his scruples with remarkable diplomacy. He was in considerable financial embarrassment, having spent all his own money on the expenses of the journey, and he was compelled to borrow from a friend of Iberti until Gonzaga chose to repay him. Iberti himself refused to advance any more ready money than was necessary for the clothes, although Rubens offered him a good rate of interest.

It was likely that Rubens would be some time in Valladolid as, on the very day of his arrival, the King had left for Burgos, some eighty miles away. Rubens's relationships with Iberti were not particularly cordial, although the appearance of courtesy was kept up. Iberti had no wish to share authority with anyone, and Gonzaga had made it clear in a letter written before the expedition started that Peter-Paul was to take part in the presentations. Iberti could not ignore this letter, but he could, and did, complain that Rubens carried no actual letters of credit. Iberti affected to consider Rubens, not as an equal but as a subordinate, an indignity which Rubens would not suffer from such a coxcomb. That is why, after his arrival in Valladolid, he wrote direct to the Duke instead of through the usual channel of Chieppio. This letter, which follows, seems again to have a touch of irony. Rubens was thoroughly disgusted with the petty financial troubles and stupid mistakes in the route of which he had been the victim.

“MY MOST SERENE LORD,—I have handed over to Signor Annibal Iberti my charge of men, horses, and vases; these are intact, the horses plump and superb, just as I took them from Your Highness's stables, and the men, except for one footman, in good health. All

the rest of the baggage, including the coach, advances by slow stages and without any risk of damage, on a lorry drawn by mules. It is already close here. I have therefore reason to hope that the first part of the mission with which Your Serene Highness deigned to entrust me has, by good fortune, been executed, if not to your entire satisfaction, at least partly so. And if I appear to have done anything wrong, either by spending too much or in any other way, I beg and pray you to be pleased to defer your censure until I have the opportunity of demonstrating to you the absolute necessity of such action. In the meantime, I console myself with your great justice, so well suited to the grandeur of your heroic mind, before whose serene splendour I bow with reverence and humbly kiss your noble hand.—Your Serene Highness's most humble servant,

PETER-PAUL RUEBENS.

“From Valladolid in the year 1603 and on 17th March.”

At last all the baggage arrived in Valladolid and was unpacked. Everything was in excellent condition except the pictures, which had been seriously damaged by the rain. Only a copy after Matsys and a portrait of Gonzaga by Pourbus, a present for Iberti, had escaped. Rubens promised to do what he could to restore the damaged canvases, a work which, he said, would take him more than a month. Luckily the King was to be away until the end of June. As there were certain small pictures which Rubens thought irreparable, Iberti brightly suggested that he should throw off some dozen rural scenes—very fashionable subjects for galleries just then, he said. Rubens seems to have taken the impertinence calmly. He merely asked for an assistant, which Iberti promised to find

him. At least that is Iberti's story. Rubens was prepared to submit to orders, but not without a dignified protest, which shows his sentiments about Iberti—and his serene master as well—pretty clearly. The letter is to Chieppio.

“MY MOST ILLUSTRIOUS SIR,—Unjust fate is jealous of my satisfaction; it continues, as it is wont, to sprinkle bitterness with joy; it opens a way, often in the most unlikely places, to troubles which human precaution cannot foresee. Here are these pictures which were arranged and packed with every possible care, by my own hands and in the presence of His Highness the Duke, and which were then inspected at Alicante by request of the customs and found quite faultless, here are they unpacked to-day at Signor Annibal Iberti's and found so perished and corroded that I almost despair of renovating them; for the harm is not superficial, it is no mere moisture or stain on the surface which one could remove, but the very canvases are entirely spoilt and destroyed, although they were all protected—but in vain—by tin plates and double waxed cloth, and packed in wooden cases. The harm is due to the rain, which has continued for twenty-five days, a thing unheard of in Spain. The damp has been soaking through for so long that the paint is peeling off, and is so blistered and crinkled in several places that the only hope of repairing it is by scraping it all off with a knife and repainting entirely.

“This is an exact account of the damage. Would to God that it had not occurred. I do not exaggerate it in order to boast of the restoration afterwards, which I shall not fail to carry out as best I can, though it has

pleased His Serene Highness to place me in charge of works to which I have not given a stroke of the brush. I speak in this way, not because I feel any resentment, but because of the proposition of Signor Annibal, who would wish to see me suddenly produce a number of pictures with the assistance of Spanish artists. I am more inclined to submit to this scheme than to approve it, because of the little time that remains to us, and the extent of the damage to the pictures, and because I know, furthermore, the unbelievable incompetence and laziness of these painters, whose style moreover—and this is important—differs entirely from mine; God preserve me from being like them in anything! In fact, *pergimus pugnantia secum cornibus adversis componere!*

“And then again the business will not remain secret because of the indiscretion of these same painters, who would resent my assistance and the retouchings which I should have to make, or would arrogate to themselves the authorship of the work. Finding that they are executed for the Duke of Lerma, they will persuade themselves that the pictures are intended for a public gallery.

“This does not trouble me very seriously and I would be quite willing to forgo the credit: but I am convinced that it is a deceit which would gain little favour, for the work done here is bound to be discovered by its freshness, whether it comes from their hand or mine. I have no wish to expose myself to this, since I have always held it a principle not to be confounded with another, however great a man he may be. If I share with them, my reputation will suffer to little purpose, for a trivial work unworthy of my name, which is already known even here.

“And yet if His Highness the Duke had given me the commission, I could have brought greater honour to him and to myself, and much greater satisfaction to the Duke of Lerma. The Duke is a connoisseur of good things, as can be seen by the particular pleasure he takes in the superb masterpieces of Titian, of Raphael, and of others, which he has daily opportunities of enjoying. The number of these pictures at the Royal Palace, at the Escorial, and elsewhere astounds me as much as their perfection, while one sees nothing worth while from the moderns.¹

“I state my case frankly; I have no other object in this court but the service of His Serene Highness, to whom I devoted myself from the first day I saw him. Let him command me, let him do with me as he will on this occasion as on every other, and let him be assured that I shall not exceed by the least tittle the limits which he prescribes me. The Lord Iberti has the same power over me—subordinately of course; I am convinced that it is with the best and most honest intentions that he ignores my advice; he shall be obeyed. I do not write with the object of throwing blame on him, but to show you my repugnance from making myself known by works which are unworthy of me and of my most serene master, who on the good report you will make to him will, I am confident, interpret favourably the considerations I have just laid before you.—Your illustrious, etc.,

“PETER-PAUL RUEBENS.

“From Valladolid, the 24th May 1603.”

After the pictures had been dried and washed with

¹ Velasquez, it must be remembered, was only four years old at this time.

warm water the damage was found to be less than had been feared, and Rubens set about the restoration hopefully. It was decided that only two small pictures, a St John after Raphael and a Madonna, need be abandoned entirely, and Iberti asked Rubens to replace them. He was to have more time than had been expected as the King's movements were delayed by the death of the Duchess of Lerma, Catalina de la Cerda, for which the Duke "showed profound affliction although he loathed the sour and haughty character of his wife." He wept abundantly every day for a month.

Rubens carried out his work of renovation most admirably and painted the *Democritus* and *Heraclitus* in addition.

Philip III at last returned to Valladolid on 1st July, seven weeks after Rubens's arrival. He did not, however, hurry to receive his presents. He was very busy discussing the situation which had arisen out of the death of Queen Elizabeth of England. First of all he despatched Count D'Orgaz, a gentleman of his chamber and his hunting companion, to choose one of the seven horses for a hackney.

It was not until the 11th that he was pleased to give orders in the matter of the presentation. The coach was to be conveyed to a garden of the Duke of Lerma about half a mile from the town, and Iberti to present himself at five o'clock in the afternoon at the palace gates. Iberti presented himself. The King and Queen, the Duke of Lerma, and certain ladies and gentlemen of the court came out and mounted into their coaches, which drove off in solemn procession to the garden. When they had all dismounted at the gate, the famous coach was brought forward, its wood-work freshly varnished a nut-brown to show up the

gilt. Everyone examined it and praised the novelty of the design and admired the horses. The ladies and the gentlemen of the chamber were prodigal of applause, and the Duke of Lerma, as first minister, was most prodigal. He graciously questioned Iberti on the breed of the horses, and then signed to him to approach the King and offer him the coach. Iberti made humble obeisance on behalf of His Serene Highness the Duke of Mantua, and a speech about the unworthy gift and great goodness of intention and profound fidelity of His Serene Highness the Duke of Mantua, and how entirely His Catholic Majesty the King of Spain might dispose of the person and estates of His Serene Highness the Duke of Mantua.

When Iberti had relieved himself in this way he presented the king with the arquebuses. The King appeared most delighted, and signified that the present pleased him not only for its beauty but also because of the goodwill of the donor, and added that he would write to the Duke to thank him and offer his services in return. He then inquired after the Duke's health.

Then they all went into the garden and the King examined the arquebuses, but as the dusk was falling, he could not try them.

In the meantime Iberti and "the Fleming," who were admitted to the garden, walked about with nonentities and listened to polite praise of the generosity of the Duke of Mantua. And for this, supreme genius had wasted over four and a half months; for this mouthing of lying compliments, this petty ceremonial, this childish mask to political intrigue. His good-for-nothing Catholic Majesty was graciously pleased; his wasteful and vicious Serene Highness

had knocked in another prop to his miserable independence; the most pompous Lord Iberti had taken the limelight, and Peter-Paul, the Fleming, walked in the garden with nonentities.

Two days later Iberti was instructed to carry the pictures and vases for the Duke of Lerma to the Palace. He went after dinner with Don Rodrigo Calderon. The Fleming arranged everything in two adjoining rooms. Iberti had added to the present the portrait of Gonzaga which had been sent to him, because the Duke of Lerma had expressed a wish for such a portrait, and it would look well if it could be made to seem as if Gonzaga had foreseen the Duke's wish.

The Duke, who had apparently got over his conjugal blubberings, came in alone in a dressing-gown. He looked at all the pictures, praised them mightily, and thought that they were originals, which may have been either diplomacy or ignorance. He was profuse with praise of the vases, too. Later in the day he showed them all to the King, and next day to the Queen and ladies of the Court, and then afterwards to the gentlemen. They were all ravished, and all thought them to be originals, including the Queen's major-domo, who was considered to be a great expert in the arts. They were also shown to the Florentine painter, Bartolommeo Carducci, but Iberti had been careful to show them to him before "in order that his judgment might fit in with the satisfaction of the Duke." So that was all right.

This present of religious pictures was particularly welcome to the Duke, because, since the death of his wife, he had stripped his walls of all profane subjects and taken up piety. Not long afterwards he procured

himself a cardinal's hat. It was said that he had an eye on the tiara.

From this man Rubens received polite phrases, which at any rate was more than he had received from the King. Iberti had not presented him.

"I assisted with my eyes," he wrote to Chieppio, "at the presentation of the coach, but I took part in that of the pictures. In both cases I was satisfied with the manner in which the very judicious Signor Annibal directed affairs. It is true that he could have taken sole charge, and yet have permitted me to pay my respects to the King, even silently; the opportunity was favourable since we were all in a public place, to which everyone was admitted.

"I do not wish to take it badly; it is a trivial matter, but I was surprised at so sudden a metamorphosis. He had several times told me of His Highness the Duke's letter, in which he was expressly instructed to present me to the King. It was a special favour which His Serene Highness intended for me.

"I do not mention this matter to grumble like some punctilious or ambitious sycophant; I am not broken-hearted by the loss of the favour. I faithfully relate what occurred, and I am quite persuaded that if Signor Iberti changed his mind at the last moment it was for some good reason, if, that is, he did not simply forget, though the matter was fresh in his memory. He did not in fact offer me any reason or any excuse for having altered the arrangements made between us half an hour before; the opportunity to speak to me has not been wanting, but he has not said a word."

It was no doubt with the object of once more assert-

ing in a dignified way his position as representative, a position which Iberti's petty jealousy had deliberately slighted, that Rubens again wrote direct to the Duke. He made no complaint, but said simply: "I witnessed the presentation of the coach; I made the presentation of the pictures"; and of Iberti he said, with beautiful cruelty: "He is a man who knows how to employ most effectively the phrases which ought to be employed in this court."

Rubens's primary object being now fulfilled, he set himself to his painting of the court beauties. Iberti wrote to the Duke that he would hurry the Fleming as much as possible, so that he might be able to send him back soon. He did not suffer gladly the presence of the brilliant and courtly young painter. Later he announced his intention of examining the accounts of the Fleming "which he thought he would submit honestly, for he did not seem to be a bad sort of fellow."

Rubens was not even invited to attend the further presentations, which were considerably delayed. The Countess of Lemos was ill and did not recover sufficiently to receive her rock-crystal crucifix and candlesticks until the 23rd. Don Pedro Franqueza refused his wall hanging, because he had resolved to accept nothing without the express permission of the King or Lerma. There had been whisperings among his enemies at the court. Iberti grasped the situation and informed Don Pedro that should he use his influence in favour of Gonzaga's appointment as admiral, Gonzaga would gratify him with thirty thousand scudi. Don Pedro replied that he wished "to serve His Highness to the height of his power, without thinking of his own interest," but that fifty or sixty thousand would

not be too large a sum. It was not surprising that there were whisperings.

In October, Rubens went to the Duke of Lerma's estate at Ventosilla, some forty-five miles from Valladolid, to finish an equestrian portrait of the Duke which he had already laid in. The King was staying there also at the time. The portrait was a great success and delighted the Duke.

There was some question of Rubens being sent to France to make further portraits of court beauties for Gonzaga's gallery. The idea did not appeal to Rubens, who had already tasted enough of wandering court life, the caprices and stupidities of princes and the jealous malice of officials. He wrote firmly, although always politely, to Chieppio, the one courtier who seemed to understand his artistic urge and greatness. The letter is undated and was evidently intended to be laid before the Duke.

"I gather from your illustrious lordship's last letter that His Serene Highness persists in the order he gave me before my departure that I should go to France. Let me, in this connection, express my opinion of how such a programme suits me, if, that is, the Duke has no other aim, as I believe, but that of getting portraits. I am somewhat puzzled to-day to see how, in several letters he has written to Signor Iberti, he has pressed for my return, as you did yourself in your letter of October 1st. It is not an urgent matter, and, moreover, missions of this sort are always open to a thousand inevitable delays. I have seen examples of that for myself in Spain and Rome: in both these missions the number of weeks allotted grew into as many months. Signor Iberti knows what unavoidable necessity has

forced us both to act on our own for lack of instructions. Believe me, the French do not lag behind any in interest, particularly as they have a King and Queen who are not strangers to the arts, as witness their great works which are at present interrupted for lack of artists.

“I have particular information on all this as well as the steps they have taken in Flanders, at Florence, and even, on false recommendation, in Savoy and Spain, to recruit men of worth. Allow me to say that I should not entrust such news to you, if I had not already chosen His Highness the Duke as my master for as long as his favour will allow me to adopt Mantua as my country.

“I should look on the pretext of making portraits, although a not very honourable one, as sufficient if it were to lead to worthier work; but I declare, when I consider the cost of the expedition, that I can only imagine that His Highness the Duke wishes to give Their Majesties an unfavourable opinion of me. I believe that it would be more certain and more advantageous both in time and money to entrust the execution of the portraits through the agency of Monsieur de la Brosse or Signor Carlo Rossi, to some painter attached to the court—who would already have a collection in his studio—than for me to waste more time and spend more money in paying salaries—which the munificence of His Highness does not repay—all to carry out work little to my taste and which anyone can do to the satisfaction of His Highness the Duke.

“All the same as a good servant I place myself entirely at the will of the Master; I beg of him, however, to be pleased to use me, either at Mantua or elsewhere, for work more fitting my talent and for the completion

of the work His Highness has already begun. I am sure of gaining this favour if you will be pleased to intercede for me with His Highness the Duke; and in that belief I very humbly kiss your hands.—Your illustrious, etc.,

PETER-PAUL RUEBENS.

“From Valladolid, 1603.”

Gonzaga was, apparently, convinced by this letter and Rubens returned direct from Spain to Italy, sometime during the winter, arriving in Mantua probably in February 1604. His brother Philip addressed a wearisome and involved Latin poem to him on the occasion of his voyage: *Ad Petrum Paulum Rubenium Navigantem*.

Not all the classical distresses he could think of—and he could think of a great many, which he did not fail to enumerate—were greater, he exclaimed:

*Quam modo magna tui divexat cura meum cor,
O mihi vel luce hac frater amabilior.*

Nothing aided the King of Ithaca in the storms of the sea,—

*Nec tibi litterulæ, mi frater, nec tibi quidquam
Vena vigorque acris proderit ingenii :
Nec manus artifices effingere docta figuras,
Ac vel Apeleis pingere per tabulis.*

Therefore poor Philip suffered abominably. He held his studies in aversion; the sun gave forth but a feeble light, likewise her pale sister with blunted horns—by which he meant the moon—the fires of the stars which enamelled the heavens were obscure, and honey itself had for him the bitterness of gall.

Luckily, however, Peter-Paul arrived safely. The

sun, the moon, and the stars shone forth, and Philip delighted again in honey and the classics.

Apelles had served the Duke of Mantua; expensive compliments had been carted over mountains and the sea; nobody was deceived and everybody was pleased; and the art of Apelles could very well wait on such important business.

CHAPTER V

THE LAST OF ITALY

RUBENS returned, then, to Mantua, where he was greeted by his brother Philip, who soon went off to join his old master, Lipsius, at Louvain.

Rubens occupied himself with painting, and among the works which he executed at this time were three important pictures for the Jesuit church in Mantua, which were ordered by the Duke in memory of his mother, who was buried there. That for the high altar represented the Trinity adored by the Gonzaga family. On the left was Vincenzo, kneeling with his father, Guglielmo; on the right his mother, Eleonora of Austria, kneeling with Eleonora de' Medici, Vincenzo's second wife. The Duke wore a brass breast-plate and armlets and a sumptuous ermine robe edged with gold; round his neck was the order of the Golden Fleece. His father was in a fur cloak. The Duchess wore white silk, trimmed with ermine and gold, and a large ruff; her hair was ornamented with pearls. Eleonora of Austria was simply dressed in black with a white hood.

Rubens received special payment for work of this kind, besides his salary as Court painter. This salary was four hundred ducats a year, although it must not, of course, be imagined that it was paid very regularly: Rubens still had to do with the Treasury of Mantua. How highly Gonzaga valued his painter

can be deduced from the fact that when, in May, he tried to attach Galileo to his Court, he only offered him three hundred ducats, with his keep and that of one servant. Galileo demanded five hundred ducats and three servants, and there was no more talk of the matter. There is no doubt, however, that Galileo visited Mantua on at least two occasions when Rubens was there, and almost certainly met him. Rubens was deeply interested in the discoveries of the mathematician, and was always very much attracted to questions of astronomy and meteorology. All his life he experimented with telescopes and microscopes, and somehow wonderfully found time to keep in touch with the scientific developments of his day.

Towards the end of November Rubens went off to Rome again, probably in the company of Philip, who was on his way back from Flanders to take up his new post of librarian to Cardinal Ascanio Colonna. Peter-Paul was certainly living in Rome with him in the following February—that is, of 1606—in a house in the Strada della Croce, where they kept two servants. Rubens busied himself in Rome with his own studies in art, made copies for Gonzaga as he had done before, and from time to time acted as his agent. In April 1607, for example, he acquired for him Caravaggio's *Death of the Virgin lamented by Apostles*.

For a part of the time he was laid up with pleurisy, which was cured by a German doctor, Johann Faber, who was in practice at that time in Rome. Rubens painted his portrait and the *Cock and the Pearl*, which he gave him. In reference to this picture, Faber wrote later: "One day when, with God's help, I had had the happiness to cure him at Rome of a pleurisy from which he suffered much, he painted me a cock,

which he accompanied with this legend, which, though jesting, displays his erudition: 'To the celebrated Johann Faber, doctor of medicine, my Æsculapius, I dedicate this picture in fulfilment of a vow made for the restoring of my health when I was doomed.' " The cock is, of course, sacred to Æsculapius.

A great deal of Rubens's time was also taken up with classical studies and learned discourses with his brother and his brother's friends. The atmosphere was laden with latinity. Philip was preparing a work, *Philippi Rubenii Electorum Libri II. In quibus antiqui Ritus, Emendationes, Censuræ. Ejusdem ad Justum Lipsium Pœmata*, which was published by Moretus at the Plantin Press in 1608, in one quarto volume. It was a collection of notes and studies on more or less obscure passages in Latin authors, and was concluded by the poem to his brother which has been summarised. The real interest of the book was in the plates, of which there were five. Four of them were engraved after drawings by Peter-Paul, whose "clever hand, and delicate and certain judgement were of great help in the work."

Rubens was not content with the study of antique sculpture for the purpose of making these drawings; he also began his collection of marbles.

Among his close friends in Rome was the painter, Adam Elsheimer, a luckless man overburdened with his family and his debts, who died in 1610 from illness contracted in a debtor's prison. Rubens wrote warmly of him, when he heard the news: "Truly such a loss should plunge all our profession into deep mourning. It will not be easy to replace him, and in my opinion he can never be equalled in small figures, landscapes, and many other things. He has died in the full course

of his studies and his harvest was still growing, so that one could hope from him things which now will never be; destiny only showed him to the world.

"I have never felt my heart more torn with distress than when I heard this news, and I can never feel friendly towards those who have driven him to so miserable an end. I pray God to pardon Adam his sin of laziness, by which he has deprived the world of so many exquisite things, caused himself so many miseries, and reduced himself to despair; when he could have made for himself, with his own hands, so great a fortune and could have won the respect of the whole world."

As usual the financial habits of Gonzaga caused trouble. Rubens was recalled to Mantua in November 1606, but he immediately wrote to Chieppio to explain that he could not leave at once. He had not received even half the salary due to him, and, therefore, from sheer necessity, he had been compelled to accept an important commission, namely, the execution of a picture for the high altar of the Oratorian church of Santa Maria in Vallicella, better known as the Chiesa Nuova. It was remarkable that a young and little-known Flemish painter should be chosen for this work over the heads of all the Roman painters; but there were those in Rome quick to see his superior genius and independent enough to support it. Rubens did not propose to throw this magnificent opportunity away and so offend his powerful patrons. He asked, therefore, for three months' leave, or, if the work for which the Duke was recalling him was of pressing importance, an absolute promise that he might return to Rome for three months in the following spring.

Rubens, as usual, wrote with marked firmness and with pride in his great calling, and he did not fail to show that the trouble was the Duke's fault. Gonzaga, he indicated, could not expect to reserve his entire services if he did not pay him. As a result of this letter he was granted the three months' leave. Rubens therefore set about his work, choosing as his subject *St Gregory and other Saints adoring the Virgin*.

In April he was still in Rome, living alone now since brother Philip had returned to Flanders at the earnest request of his mother and friends there, and because he was in hope of being appointed one of the secretaries of the town. The way had to be prepared for this, and above all he had to be naturalised; it will be remembered that he had been born in Cologne. The naturalisation was granted on 4th July.

When Rubens received a minute advance of what was due to him from Mantua, he wrote a letter to Chieppio which is worthy of quotation, because it demonstrates that Rubens, although firm in financial matters, was far from being really mercenary, and that the references to money, which are so frequent in his letters at this time, were not of his choice but forced on him by Mantuan irregularity.

“MOST ILLUSTRIOUS AND HONOURABLE MASTER,—I have received the letter of credit for fifty scudi, payable at sight, which was not necessary; the delay of a few days would not have embarrassed me. You show too great a delicacy in the favours you accord your servants by adding to them your reflections on such unworthy matters. I shall always delight to receive your letters on such conditions; I will even willingly allow the most serene Lord Duke a double delay for what

remains due to me. I really do understand the difficulties of the times. Let this be handed on to pacify the Treasury. It only remains for me to say, sir, that I am as obliged to you as if I had received the money as a present from yourself. Thanking you with all my heart, I kiss your hands.—Yours illustrious, etc.,

“PETER-PAUL RUBENS.

“From Rome, the 28th April 1607.”

Sometime late in May, Gonzaga was attacked by the rheumatism, from which he had suffered before, and he decided to go to Spa for the waters. He wrote to Rome ordering Rubens to accompany him. The prospect of going to Flanders must have been pleasant to the Fleming in him, but to the painter in him it was most unpleasant. His big commission was not yet completed, and he would have to leave before the unveiling of his picture and without a financial settlement. Jacopo Serra, Commissary General of the Pontifical Army and the Grand Treasury, who was in charge of the whole affair, was away in Venice. Moreover, the miraculous picture of the Virgin which was to be placed at the top of Rubens's picture, could not be transported until the middle of September. The whole was to be unveiled at the same time, and Rubens was anxious to retouch his work when it was in place, but before it was unveiled. He submitted, however, to the order of the Duke, only asking that after their return from Flanders he would be allowed a month in Rome to put everything in order. Cardinal Scipio Borghese, a patron of Rubens in Rome, wrote direct to the Duke to second this request.

Rubens set off on 12th June, but before he reached Mantua the Duke had changed his mind or got over

his rheumatism. He decided to go to San Pietro d'Arena, a suburb of Genoa much favoured by the Italian nobility during the heat; there he stayed in the palazzo of Giovanni-Batisto Grimaldi.

Rubens did not waste his time. He enlarged his knowledge by the study of architecture, which resulted in a volume of engravings from Genoese palaces, which he published some time later.¹ They remained in Genoa until 24th August.

Shortly after the return to Mantua the Duke received a letter from the Archduke Albert, Sovereign of the Netherlands, asking leave for Rubens to visit Flanders and put certain personal affairs in order. The letter was written at the instance of Rubens's relatives, and was worded in a direct, official manner. Gonzaga's reply, on the contrary, smacked of brusqueness and impertinence.

"For some years," he wrote, "Peter-Paul Rubens, a Flemish painter, has been in my service, both to my satisfaction and to his. I cannot believe that he has any idea of relinquishing this service, in which he appears to be entirely happy. Therefore, if I cannot give in to his relatives' desire for his return, a desire which they have tried to support with the authority of Your Highness, Your Highness will excuse me. The wish of the said Peter-Paul is quite otherwise; it is to remain here, as mine is to keep him here. Your Highness, I am sure, will take this in good part, since I also allow my subjects to serve other princes, and I would allow it all the more willingly if it concerned Your Highness, whose hands I kiss, praying God to grant you all happiness."

¹ See page 124.

It seems from this that Gonzaga did not believe in the excuses of personal affairs but suspected an attempt to get his painter away from him. It is very doubtful whether Rubens was consulted in the matter. He could hardly have felt at that moment entirely happy in Gonzaga's service, having recently been dragged to Genoa, when he wanted to be in Rome, and had hoped to go to Flanders.

However, he returned to Rome now and completed his work for the Chiesa Nuova, which was most fervently praised by all who were allowed to examine it privately, including the Oratorian fathers. But when it was hung in place over the High Altar, the light was found to be so bad that it could hardly be seen. Rubens was deeply distressed to find so much valuable work wasted in obscurity.

"One can hardly distinguish the figures," he wrote to Chieppio, "or appreciate the beauty of colour, or the delicacy of the heads and draperies, which I worked at with great care and always from nature. . . . Since, then, the whole merit of the work is lost, and I can win no credit for all my trouble, I think of not unveiling it but taking it down and trying to find a better place for showing it, although the price was fixed at eight hundred scudi or ducats, at ten giuli to the scudo. . . . But the fathers do not wish that the picture should be removed unless I undertake to make a copy with my own hands for the same altar, which is to be painted on stone or some material which absorbs the colour so that the picture will not reflect light. I do not think it fitting my honour to leave two similar pictures in Rome, both from my own hand.

"I recall that Their Highnesses the Duke and

Duchess told me once that they wanted one of my pictures for the gallery. I assure you that, since Their Highnesses wish to do me this honour, I should be extremely glad if they would take this picture. Without any doubt it is far the best and most successful of my works; I should not easily set all my faculties to such an effort again, and if I did, perhaps I should not succeed so well. In every way this picture would hold its own, even in that gallery where works by great men rival one another. Although the price was fixed at eight hundred scudi, I shall not stand by the estimate made at Rome; I submit myself to the discretion of His Highness, who may pay me when he will except for two or three hundred scudi which I need now while making the copy. . . .

“In order that you may be well informed in the whole matter, I will venture to assert, sir, that the composition is very beautiful because of the number, the size, and the variety of the figures, old men, young men, and women all richly dressed. They are all saints, but they do not carry any sign or attribute which would not fit any other saint of the same rank. The picture is not so large that it will be necessary to reserve much space for it; it is rectangular and upright.”

By return courier, Chieppio answered that the Duke could not acquire Rubens's picture as great economy was being exercised at the Mantuan court. The same letter relates how His Highness was off to Turin for the wedding of his eldest son with Margaret of Savoy, “with a cortège of cavaliers, more numerous and more magnificent than was ever seen.” Such was Mantuan economy.

Gonzaga's ungraciousness on this occasion makes it

seem as if he were growing tired of a pet that would not remain as docile as his crocodiles. At the end of this year he was to lose the pleasure of having Monteverdi in his collection. The musician, thoroughly sickened of the weathercock patronage of Gonzaga, wrote to Chieppio: "I conclude by stating that I wish to take neither graces nor favours from Mantua; all I could expect by coming back there would be to receive a last blow of ill-fortune. No; I am too unhappy there!" Gonzaga was in a fair way to lose his Fleming as well.

Rubens's answer to Chieppio was a model of restraint and dignity.

"MY MOST ILLUSTRIOUS LORD,—Although my affair has not succeeded, I am no less obliged to you than I would be if it had; for I know that you have done more on my behalf than I ought to expect from one of your rank. Moreover, to tell the truth, I am no longer urgent in the matter. Since my picture has been publicly exhibited for several days, in the same church but in a better light, it has been seen and applauded by all Rome. So much so, that I am certain of placing it well here, which I do not mind since the fathers have given me permission to make what changes in the copy I please. I believe that on account of the expenses of the wedding, I should have given no little trouble *in re pecuniaria* to your treasury at Mantua, if it had had to satisfy me; I suppose it will have enough trouble when it pays me my salary so long overdue. Indeed on further thought it seems to me that I ought almost to consider it lucky not to have succeeded in our proposition. It only remains for me to beg you to press Her Serene Highness for the payment of the

picture Her Highness expressly ordered to be executed here in Rome for her chapel by Signor Cristoforo Pomerancio.¹ I wrote all details about this picture to Signor Fillipo Persio, who, to my great surprise, has gone away without letting me have any answer.

“That is why I am bound to trouble you again and inform you of the actual facts. It was on my recommendation that Her Serene Highness was well and promptly served although Pomerancio was very busy. Her Highness several times referred the price to me, but I did not wish to accept the responsibility; however, I approached Pomerancio, who had at first confined himself to an exchange of compliments with Her Highness, and brought him to fix on five hundred golden scudi. This appeared exorbitant to Her Serenity, who, perhaps, does not know what is customary with the leading masters of Rome, and thought to deal with them after our Mantuan style.

“Nevertheless, she again appealed to me. I examined the picture then with several connoisseurs, as well as with Signor Magno,² with whom I agreed that Her Highness could not pay less than four hundred golden scudi. Therefore I beg you to do me the favour of pressing Her Serenity to give orders for the payment of this amount as soon as possible. If not, I shall be most awkwardly placed, and I shall not risk taking on any further commissions such as this, which Her Highness imposed on me by innumerable pressing letters.³

“Therefore I have recourse to you, sir, as I usually do in all my difficulties. I know by experience with

¹ Cristoforo Roncalli, known as il Pomerancio, a fashionable painter of his day.

² The Mantuan representative in Rome.

what warmth you take me under your protection in all things and in every way. And humbly kissing your hands, I pray God to grant you all happiness.—Your illustrious, etc.,

PETER-PAUL RUBENS.

“Rome, 23rd February 1608.

It seems that Rubens remained in Rome continuously, although Gonzaga went to Flanders and even to Antwerp. The relationship between them was strained to breaking-point. Then, at the end of October, Rubens wrote this letter to Chieppio, the last of that long correspondence.

“MY MOST ILLUSTRIOUS LORD,—I think it is my duty, since His Highness is not at Mantua, to render you an account of the necessity which compels me to what may seem impertinence—namely, that to my already long absence I must add another in a country farther away, although I hope it may not be for too long. The reason is, that yesterday I received very bad news of my mother’s health. She is seriously ill with asthma, which, added to the weight of her seventy years, leaves little hope for her but that end which is common to all humanity. It is a hard thing for me to hurry to such a spectacle; it is hard, also, to forgo the permission of my serene patron. That is why I have consulted Signor Magno, and we have thought that I would do well to try to meet His Highness at some point on his journey, and therefore to choose a route which will be determined by the news I receive of his movements.

“What consoles me is that on the arrival of His Highness in Antwerp my relatives will have insisted that I should be sent for, and will have informed

Signor Fillipo Persio and Signor Annibal Iberti¹ of the need of my presence.²

"Thanks to their intervention my relatives will have gained hope of His Highness's compassion in such circumstances. But the illness had not reached so desperate a state then, as it is in now; that is why, writing to me then, they did not make a supreme effort as they do now. Be pleased, I beg you, sir, to favour me by informing Her Serenity of my misfortune, and pardon me if, to gain time and rejoin His Highness the Duke, I do not touch at Mantua, but go by the direct route with all speed.

"I say nothing of my return, except that the will of my most serene patron will always be fulfilled and respected by me as an inviolable law, in all places and at all times. I have finished my work on the three large pictures for the Chiesa Nuova at Rome; if I do not deceive myself, this is the least unsuccessful work my hand has yet done. However, since the marble fittings are not finished, I leave without unveiling it, so urgent is my haste. But that has no effect on the condition of the work, which has been painted on stone, in public and on the spot. Therefore, on my return from Flanders, I could come straight to Mantua, which, for many reasons, would be most agreeable to me, above all because I could place myself at your service. I kiss your hands, and pray you to hold me in your good graces and those of my most serene patron.—Your illustrious, etc.,

"PETER-PAUL RUBENS.

"From Rome the 28th October 1608."

¹ Iberti was back from Spain and in the personal train of the Duke.

² There was no communication between the Mantuans and the Rubens family.

Rubens set off on the day on which he had written this letter, with his inseparable companion and pupil, Deodate del Monte. He appears to have gone straight to Genoa where he hoped to meet the Duke. He, however, had not yet arrived, and Rubens determined not to wait but to go forward by the most direct route. The journey from Rome to Antwerp would have taken, travelling at the highest possible speed, until 6th December. Rubens was a brilliant horseman and his anxiety spurred him to ride hard. He arrived in Antwerp on the 11th December, despite his detour to Genoa. It was eight and a half years since he had left his mother. When, now, he came back to her, it was only to learn that she had died on 19th October, some days before he had left Rome.

Above her tomb in the Abbey of St Michael, Rubens hung his *St Gregory*, of which he had thought so much, and on the altar he was to write:

*Matri Virgini
hanc tabulam a se pictam
de suo ornatam,
piu affectu ad opt. matris sepulcrum
commune cum uxore Isabella Brant
sua sibi die Petrus Paullus Rubens
L.M.D.
Ipso D. Michaelis Archangeli
Anno M.DCX.*

In the years of quiet strength when she had been a bourgeois wife in Antwerp, while her husband had saved his skin and displayed his Latin, and her first children had been born; in the years of sorrow and struggle when she had been an exile in Germany, while her husband had been unfaithful to her and saved his skin and displayed his Latin, and her children had

grown up or died and more children had been born to her; in the years of loneliness, when she was an old woman at home again, while the children that were left to her had been about the dazzling world; in all these seventy years Maria Pypelinckx had served well. Now her service was over.

But the child whom she had born in disgrace, but whose name she had, by her white lie, kept unsullied; the boy whom she had watched over in his growing with an unrelenting care; the youth whom she had bravely sent out to the distant country that was to crown his development, had come back at last, a man and a Master; and the tears which he shed for her, so long and so tenderly, were the most precious tears in the whole world. Maria Pypelinckx was immortal in the memory of her immortal son.

CHAPTER VI

ANTWERP

ANTWERP had been a city of tragedy for the last fifty years. The enormous prosperity of the early sixteenth century when she was "the economic centre of Europe and the market of the world," when over two thousand ships would sometimes anchor in the Scheldt at one time, had been succeeded by years of war and famine and pestilence. In 1575 there had been a financial crisis; in 1576, a year before Rubens's birth, the Spaniards, bearing the standard of Christ Crucified, had sacked her to the cry: "*Sant Iago! Sant Iago! España! España! Á sangre! Á carne! Á fuego! Á sacca!*" The veteran soldiers and their whores, having commended themselves to God in communal prayer, had rushed pillaging, murdering, and burning through her streets. "The garrison of mercenaries had fled; the citizens had been killed, bravely defending their houses. They had resisted for a time in the Place de Meir, but the long rapiers of Spain had found easy homes in their unarmoured bodies. The floor of the Exchange had run with blood and the corpses had lain about in ghastly heaps. The assailants had hesitated a moment in the Grand' Place, where the houses had been defended like fortresses, and arquebuses had appeared at every window. Then the whole quarter and the town hall had been put to flames. The only

hope had been escape; the fugitives, rushing on with panic, had been driven into the Scheldt by the Spanish cavalry. Six or eight thousand citizens had been slaughtered, burnt, or drowned.”¹ Then the pillaging had begun in earnest, the “Spanish Fury” had been let loose; and it had lasted for fifteen days. Every means was used to discover the hidden treasures of the citizens; the foulest tortures did not come amiss to the soldiers of Sant Iago. Men were hung by the legs and arms, and women by their hair; and the soles of their feet were burnt until they revealed the hiding-places of their wealth. The poor were murdered because they had nothing; the rich were tortured until they had nothing. It was said that four million gulden were stolen. And beyond this mercenary cruelty the soldiers enjoyed themselves mightily. Girls were seized from their parents and their lovers, and flogged naked through the streets until they died; old women were hung and cut down and hung again as long as they could live up to the fun. The bodies were left in the gutters to rot and stink and spread pestilence. And then the Spanish soldiers set up their dicing tables in the Bourse, turned their gold into dagger hilts and helmets and breastplates, and “every Don Diego of them must walk, jetting up and down the streets, with his harlot by him in her chain and bracelets of gold.”

Thus, with the pomp and circumstance of glorious war, Antwerp had been reduced to half her population, *magna civitas magna solitudo*, a great state and a great desert, her shops empty, and the grass growing in her streets, a city where “two walking pedlers and one ballad-seller will carry as much on their backs at

¹ Hourticq.

once as was in that royall exchange ether above or below . . . and the whole country of Brabant was suitable to this town; *splendida paupertas*, faire and miserable.”¹

To this city, when the armistice of 1607 was in force and the twelve years peace of 1609 in preparation, when its citizens, taking breath again, looked hopefully to the future, came Peter-Paul Rubens to be its greatest citizen. He was then but a few months over thirty. His forehead was high and clear, the long hair parted on the left, and brushed well back. He wore a trim beard, with long moustaches that twirled up dashingly at the ends. His hair and beard were auburn, his complexion fresh, and his lips very red and full-blooded. There was a confident depth in his large brown eyes.

Although he found that the old house in the Kloosterstraat had lost its dear mistress, he did not find it empty. Philip was there, and there Peter-Paul went to live too. And he found friends to greet in Antwerp: his three masters in painting, Verhaecht, Van Noort, and Vaenius; Balthasar Moretus, his boy friend from Verdonck's school; and many learned men whom he had met at one time or another in the company of brother Philip. He was officially admitted to their society, the Society of Romanists, on 29th June, when Jan Breugel, the dean, welcomed “Signor Pietro-Paolo Rubens.”

It was a circle that honoured and respected him, as he was honoured and respected in Rome, in Mantua, and in Genoa; but fame spread slowly in those days of considered judgment, and Rubens was still a stranger to most of the world. And yet how greatly certain

¹ Dudley Carleton.

people admired him is evidenced by the statement made in 1606 by Gaspar Scioppius, a very learned man and a most extraordinary snob. "My friend Peter-Paul Rubens," he wrote—in Latin, of course,—“is a man in whom I do not know what to praise most, his powers in the art of painting, in which, according to connoisseurs, he seems to have attained perfection, if anyone has in these days, or his knowledge in all literary matters, or that refinement of taste which he joins to a quite particular charm of speech and conversation.”

The fame of Rubens, though still limited, was sufficiently great to interest the rulers of the Netherlands. In August 1609 they presented him with a gold chain and a medal with their effigies, which cost three hundred florins; and on 23rd September in the same year they issued a patent stating, with the usual redundancy and complexity of such documents, that having received a good report of Peter-Paul Rubens, of his judgment and great experience both in painting and many other arts, they were confident in his loyalty and diligence, and retained, appointed, ordered, and established him by those presents to the office of Court painter, giving him the full power and special authority of the said office, and urging him to do well and duly all things that a good and loyal painter can and should do. Moreover, they granted him an annual salary of five hundred Flemish pounds of forty gross and all rights, honours, liberties, exemptions, and immunities such as were enjoyed by other domestics and servants.

On 9th January 1610 Rubens was sworn in by Messire Ferdinande de Salinas, Councillor and “*maistre de requestes ordinaire*” of the Privy Council. Among

other things he swore that he had neither offered, promised, nor given any money or present to anyone, nor would do so "save and except what it is customary to give."

This finished his service with Gonzaga. His new masters, whom he accepted, though he felt "little wish to start the life of courtier again," were Albert of Austria, late Cardinal-Archbishop of Toledo and Viceroy of Portugal, and his wife, Isabella Clara Eugenia, Infanta of Spain. This lofty couple were joint Archdukes of the Netherlands, ruling in a kind of independence, although still subject to Spain in certain matters, and still entertaining Spanish garrisons in the principal strongholds. Albert was a pleasant and competent person, with a genuine interest in the arts; an undistinguished looking man, with a prominent nose and thick lips. Isabella, the favourite daughter of Philip II of Spain, a plump-faced woman with a somewhat stern expression, had a more brilliant mind, but she was unluckily tainted with the grim and angry religion of her country. Rubens said of her, many years later: "She is dowered with all the virtues which can be found in woman; long experience has made her skilled in the government of peoples, and shown her the falseness of the theories that newcomers bring us from Spain." Rubens, we know, though he was polite, was never a liar. His true opinion always bit through the layer of courtly phrases, and sometimes, even when he wrote of the greatest, he dispensed with the layer. We may accept him as good evidence.

Rubens could look bravely at the future now: his city was at peace; his rulers had accepted him; his friends believed in him; the churches of Antwerp,

stripped bare by Protestant fanaticism, waited for him; his hand was trained to whatever task he set it; his genius burned fiercely within him. There was no pinnacle of greatness he might not hope to scale.

CHAPTER VII

ISABELLA BRANT

THERE were three women in Rubens's life; his mother, who formed him; his first wife, who shared the triumph of his early maturity; his second wife, who saw his mellow glory, and watched his eyes dim, and closed them. There were a thousand women in his art; indeed there was all Woman, with all her charm and sweetness and power and seductive richness. But he never allowed these others, whose forms delighted his artist's eye, to encroach on the heart, which he so completely gave to Isabella and Helena. His life was free of all intrigues, all sexual pettiness. He could not endure looseness, even in conversation. Scioppius records that once he made an expedition from Rome to Tivoli with the two Rubens and Daniel Lhermite, secretary to the Grand Duke of Tuscany. As they walked, Lhermite commented with relish on the obscenities of Petronius and Aretino, and when they visited a café to drink he drew indecent pictures on the walls, until at last Rubens felt himself compelled to make a violent protest. Such rigour might seem priggish in a common man, but in Rubens it was but the complement of his lofty ideals and noble purity of life. His pictures are sufficient proof that this rigour was not the result of any perverted or atrophied sex feeling. He was magnificently healthy and magnificently human.

It was on 3rd October 1609 that Rubens married Isabella Brant. She was the daughter of Jan Brant, an Anversoise, who had studied at Louvain, in France and Italy and Germany, and had finally settled to practise as a lawyer in his native city. There he had married Clara de Moy, a daughter of Henri de Moy. Her sister Maria, after certain careful flirtations, had married Philip Rubens in May. Writing to Johann Faber, the doctor who had treated him in Rome, Rubens excused his delay in answering a letter from Faber because "my brother's marriage gave us so much to do that we have been able to think of nothing but the service of the ladies, he as husband and I as president of the fêtes. . . . My brother has been truly favoured by Venus, by the Loves and Juno and all the Gods: a well-beloved, beautiful, cultured, gracious, well-born, and rich woman, alone capable of refuting the whole of the Sixth Satire of Juvenal, has fallen to his lot. It was a happy moment when he decided to put off the toga of learning and give himself to the cult of Cupid. I shall not hurry to imitate him, since he has made so good a choice that truly he is inimitable, and I should not like him to think my wife an ugly creature beside his."

Rubens did not hold this resolution long; he apparently felt that Isabella could bear comparison with her aunt, and so he made her her sister-in-law as well.

His other new connection, Jan Brant, Isabella's father, was First Secretary of Antwerp, a friend of Lipsius, and, therefore, of course, an ardent Latinist, his particular study being Cæsar, on whom he had published a really valuable commentary. Later he wrote on Cicero and Apuleius, and on the duties of

councillors. He was not to die until a few months before his new son-in-law, Peter-Paul. The portrait of him which Rubens painted in 1635 shows a very hearty septuagenarian, his fine face twinkling with good humour, his cheeks ruddy, his mouth ready to laugh, his eyes keen. He evidently did not allow Cæsar or secretarial worries to quench his humanity; he was a very lovable old fellow.

His eldest daughter, Isabella, was born in Antwerp on 20th October 1591. She was therefore not quite eighteen when Rubens married her in the church of St Michael, where his mother was buried. Knowing that Isabella would be pleasing to the dead, Rubens had chosen that church, though it was not his parish church. So he linked up Isabella and Maria, and by his tender remembrance made sorrow sweet and gave dignity to joy.

In the Antwerp of that time and in Rubens's circle, such an occasion could not go by without a Latin poem. It was supplied by Daniel Heinsius, the professor of philology at Leyden. It may be loosely rendered in prose as follows:

“He who honoureth us all, who in his art surpasseth all the ancients even including Apelles, the painter of Cos and Parrhasius; he who knoweth how to represent the figures of far-off heroes and whose divine hand traceth the sacred lineaments of princes, hath quailed before mysterious Love (and who doth not quail before him?) and become the plaything of a young virgin. Venus, born to touch the hearts of mortals, filled all his being with the painting of a beautiful face. Oh, how often did he not try, by his art, to free himself from his poignant longings, only to declare himself van-

quished? Oh, how often did he not try to draw the sweet face of his well-beloved and how often hath not his hand had to cease from work? By eloquent words he must appease Brant; but a white throat such as Phœbus loveth, and even more the celebrity of the father-in-law, whose glory is sung abroad, inflame him. At last he approacheth and softeneth the father-in-law, and the vanquished of love vanquisheth in his turn. He joineth to his own merit that of his brother, and turneth it to good purpose. Already the glory of Philip Rubens is revealed to the whole world; he findeth readers throughout the universe. These motives persuade; the mother yieldeth, and the father, and little by little the girl alloweth herself to be won. Already, O happy young man, the Gods have granted thee a night of joy and Venus doth not withhold her. Let thy father-in-law soon look upon delightful grandchildren; make all the family joyous with descendants like unto thyself. Thou who hast the gift of reproducing the forms of others, do better than painting and bring thy form to birth again in the forms of thy children."

Since brother Philip was already allied to the Brant family and Peter-Paul in a good way to fame, we must question the truth of this proper picture of hard wooing and eventual winning, and believe rather that for Rubens, always so magnificently the master of his fate, the path of true love ran, on the contrary, remarkably smooth.

Brother Philip did not fail, of course, to produce his epithalamium, too, in his usual tangled Latin. He opened with an address to Hymen, whom he summoned to the nuptials, not mentioning that they were to take place in a church dedicated to the new-fangled St

Michael. He summoned him also to the bridal chamber, for which his brother longed so ardently, and the bride, he becomingly asserted, with moderation. For certainly, he reiterated, her virginal impatience was moderate that day, but the next, he somewhat indelicately suggested, she would vow that the night before had excelled the most beautiful day. Then he proceeded to particular eulogies of all concerned, even to the bride's grandfather, who was so learned in the differences between municipal rights and imperial institutions, even to the bridegroom's father, old Jan, though without a word of Anne of Saxony. Indeed, he knew nothing of that affair, since Maria Pypelinckx—who having neither art nor learning was not mentioned in these lucubrations—since Maria had hidden that affair from her sons, and left them to glory in the memory of their father as that of a wise, prudent, and learned man. Then back went Philip to Hymen, having landed Apollo and Polygnotus as prototypes of his brother, besides the somewhat hackneyed Apelles, back to Hymen and further polite indelicacies, which that robust age could well bear—especially in obscure Latin—in the course of which Peter-Paul appears as Adonis and Cupid. Finally he begged that “before the star with the golden aureole hath accomplished his annual course,” which we may take to mean in nine months, Isabella will “boast of a descendant that resembleth her husband.” In their old-fashioned way, these Antwerp worthies believed that the object of marriage was the getting of children.

It appears that Rubens went to live with his bride in her father's house in the Kloosterstraat, a few doors from Maria Pypelinckx's. One of his first works was

to paint the famous portrait of himself and Isabella, the true epithalamium of this beautiful marriage. They are sitting among the honeysuckle in their richest clothes; the handsome bridegroom lounges nonchalantly on a bench, one strong but graceful hand toying with his sword-hilt, the other lying under that of his bride, who sits at his feet. His hatband is rich with jewels, his elegant collar is of fine lace, his pour-point is yellow shot with green and ornamented with black lace; his breeches are in black velvet, sumptuously embroidered, his stockings are orange, his brown cloak lined with black, his hat fashionably *à la Henri Quatre*. The lining of Isabella's hat is green, her jacket is black, and her bodice blue satin, embroidered in black and gold; her skirt is violet, and her petticoat yellow. She wears jewels in her bracelet and her hat-clasp. The winning little face with its reddish-brown hair and large brown eyes looks gaily and confidently from the canvas. The whole picture is a song of present happiness and serene hope.

Dominique Baudius, Historiographer of the States of Holland, one of the most incurable of the Latin versifiers of his time, wrote an epigram on this picture, which he sent to Rubens some years later:

“Behold the celebrated painter and his faithful wife. Happy couple! Never have their equals been seen. He by his art is the rival of Nature; she by her beauty hath conquered Cypris. Both are perfect, and one point only remaineth to be settled, which surpasseth the other in tenderness and virtue.”

Now began for Rubens a period of hard but joyful work, and daily increasing fame. Among his many

patrons and close friends, besides those already mentioned, was Nicholas Rockox, the son of a rich citizen of Antwerp, one of the aldermen of his city, and nine times burgomaster, a man of wide learning and extraordinary intelligence, a collector of medals, coins, engraved gems, and antique sculpture. It was such men that Rubens received when his work was done—municipal authorities who, although it sounds so paradoxical to us, were the most intellectual class in Antwerp.

Pupils flocked to the studio, which was already the artistic centre of the city. In the spring of 1611 Rubens was forced to write to Jacques de Bie, the celebrated engraver and a very dissipated and extravagant man, whom in later years he was to save from his creditors, that he could not receive the young man whom he recommended to him.

“From all sides,” he wrote, “similar aspirants come to me. Some even remain for years with other masters to await a vacancy in my studio. Among others, Monsieur Rockox, my friend and protector as you know, has with great difficulty obtained a place in this way for a young fellow whom he maintains, and whom he leaves, while he is waiting, in another studio. I can say sincerely and without any exaggeration, that I have had to refuse more than a hundred, among whom were members of my family and my wife’s, and that I have not done it without causing great displeasure to some of my best friends.”

His fame as an antiquarian spread almost as rapidly as his fame as a painter. He began to be consulted on obscure matters of classical interpretation by scholars all over Europe.

In the August of 1611 a sudden sorrow invaded Rubens's triumphant life. Brother Philip, who had been a secretary of Antwerp for two and a half years now, although only thirty-eight years old, died after a short illness. A son, Philip, was born to his wife fifteen days later. It was this Philip who was to write the earliest biography of his uncle, the *Vita Petri Pauli Rubenii*. In a letter to Peter-Paul written a few weeks later, Dominique Baudius, that Historiographer of the States of Holland whose epigram on Rubens and Isabella has been quoted, is a simple and sincere statement, which may serve as epitaph for brother Philip: "A man of the deepest learning, without ambition, and one who profited from the lessons of Justus Lipsius as fully as any," or better, in the stately language he loved so well: "*Vir sine ambitione, eruditissimus, et quo nullus e disciplina magni Lipsii uberiolem frugem reportavit.*" Moretus and Woverius wrote more elaborate, more learned, but no less sincere epitaphs.

It was this Baudius who in a later letter asked Rubens for a picture as a wedding present and offered him, by way of anticipatory return, a lengthy and abominable Latin eulogy, in which, among many wonderful extravagances, he affirmed that Nature herself was rejoiced at being surpassed by such a rival; nor did he fail to compare Rubens to Apelles. While these effusions cannot, of course, be taken at their face value, they are at least evidence of the spreading fame of the master. Baudius, like so many of these worthy scholars, was a good deal of a toady. He would not have wasted his precious hexameters on an unworthy subject. As a further evidence we may adduce the presentation of an *Adoration of the Magi* by the magistrates of Antwerp to Don Rodrigo Calderon, Count D'Olive, Envoy

Extraordinary of the King of Spain, as "the most important and rarest present they had to offer."

Writing to Rubens in 1614 to introduce his nephew Stadius, Justus Rycquius, another of those Romanophil notables, whose approval in those days was the desire of all artists, addressed him as "the grandest of masters in the most delicate of arts. To know you," he continued, "to enter your house as into the temple of some divinity, would be a great happiness for Stadius. . . . To see Rubens, to salute him, to enjoy his conversation, that is what he would regard as a supreme joy."

Francis Sweertius, writing to William Camden, the historian, said: "We have here a very celebrated painter called Rubens, known throughout the whole world and truly learned."

At the end of 1615 Rubens moved into the palatial house on the Wapper,¹ which he had bought in 1611 for seven thousand six hundred florins, and spent the last five years, and a very great deal of money, on enlarging and embellishing. The building now consisted of two houses joined by a portico, pierced with three arches, which led into the gardens beyond. On entering the courtyard between the two houses, the original building was on the left, the new building on the right: this Rubens had built on the site of a laundry. Through the portico could be seen a pavilion, which contained statues of Hercules, Bacchus, and Ceres. The surrounding garden was laid out with symmetrical beds and flower-shaped patches of lawn, ornamented with large vases. Among them wandered peacocks and high-bred dogs. The new building was decorated with frescoes, columns, busts, and caryatids. In the

¹ Now Rubenstraat.

angle between the courtyard façade and the portico was a rockwork grotto, containing a fountain and a statue group of a shepherd and a stag. The sculpture on the grand staircase was by Jan van Mildert. Under the busts on the side arches of the portico were marble slabs on which were inscribed two quotations from the Tenth Satire of Juvenal:

*“Permites ipsis expendere numinibus, quid
Conveniat nobis, rebusque sit utile nostris . . .
Carior est illis homo, quam sibi”*

(“Leave it to the Gods to decide what is right for us and useful to our future. . . . They are better friends to man than himself”), and

*“Orandum est, ut sit mens sana in corpore sano.
Fortem posce animum, et mortis terrore carentem,
Nesciat irasci, cupiat nihil.”*

(“Let your prayer be for a healthy mind in a healthy body, pray for a brave heart, that knows not the fear of death . . . and is innocent of fear and cupidity”).

This last motto, less hackneyed then, we may hope, than now, was a wonderful choice for Rubens; he had evidently prayed for these things since the Gods had so obviously granted them to him, unless we may conceive it possible that the Gods occasionally act without human suggestion.

Rubens and his family lived in the old building. The majority of the new building was given up to his studio, a vast room forty-six feet long by thirty-four feet six inches wide and about thirty feet high, lit by the four large windows and the rose-window that looked on to the courtyard, and the three even larger windows that looked on to the garden. Above this was a second studio for his pupils and assistants.

The interiors of both houses were splendidly decorated with marbles, pictures, statues, and carvings, to which Rubens never ceased to add. The dining-room was hung with gilded leather, stamped with gold. The mantelpiece was in black marble and the firedogs were gilt. The furniture was dark oak. Three pictures by Rubens completed the decoration of this dignified and sumptuous room.

Such was the palace the prince of painters built for himself. There he was to receive the learned and powerful men of many countries; from there he was to send out a ceaseless flow of masterpieces to glorify the world; and there now he took Isabella his wife, and Clara Serena and Albert, his eldest children.

CHAPTER VIII

SIR DUDLEY CARLETON

SIR DUDLEY CARLETON was a native of Oxfordshire, educated at Westminster and Christchurch. He began his diplomatic career as secretary to Sir Edward Norris, Governor of Ostend. Afterwards he held the same post to Sir Thomas Parry, British Ambassador in France, and after that again to the Earl of Northumberland. He sat in the first parliament of James I, and, after a period of inactivity when he lay quiet under a suspicion of being concerned in the Gunpowder Plot, he was knighted and sent as Ambassador to Venice. From there he went to the Hague, where he came into contact with Rubens. His subsequent career was most distinguished, culminating in a secretaryship of state under Charles I, with the title of Viscount Dorchester—but what concerns us most here is that he was a great amateur of the arts and a collector of pictures and antique marbles.

The relationship between him and Rubens opened in this way. One Toby Matthew, son of the Archbishop of York, a great lover, a painter, poet, and fervent Roman Catholic, was employed by Carleton on artistic missions. While in Brussels he negotiated with Rubens on Carleton's behalf for the purchase of a *Fox and Wolf Hunt*. The proposed price was a diamond necklace. But the necklace was only valued

at fifty pounds, and Rubens wanted eighty for his picture. Toby bothered him considerably, but Rubens would not abate his price. After many despairing letters Toby at last wrote to Carleton that he thought the Duc D'Aerschot had bought the picture, as indeed he had. But there was now another in existence. The original had been enormous, and Rubens, "for the great gusto" which he had taken in "that peece of hunting," had made another version of it, "much less." Toby wrote to Carleton to suggest that he should take this, which Rubens was ready to let go for the diamond necklace, and Toby added:

" . . . Concerninge the causinge of anie part thereof to be made by Snyder, that other famous Painter, Y^r L^p and I have been in an errour, for I thought as yⁿ doe, that his hand had been in that Peece, but sincerley and certainly it is not soe. For in this Peece the beasts are all alive, and in act eyther of escape or resistance, in the expressing whereof Snyder doth infinitlie come short of Rubens, and Rubens saith that he should take it in ill part, if I should compare Snyders wth him in that point. The talent of Snyders, is to represent beasts but especiallie Birds altogether dead, and wholly wthout anie action; and that w^{ch} y^r L^p, Mr Gage, and I sawe of his hand, w^{ch} we liked soe well was a gruppo of dead Birds, in a picture of Diana, and certaine other naked Nimphes; as Rubens protesteth, and Mr Gage avoweth, and now myself doe well remember it."

Toby concluded his letter with a tribute to Rubens which shows that although their relationship had been

so far only an unsuccessful money squabble, he began to understand Rubens's character.

"I see he is disposed to doe his best; and me thinkes he rather chuseth not to doe it, then to doe it soe as not get hon^r by it. . . ."

At last the picture, with others ordered by Carleton from Jan Breugel, Snyder, and Sebastian Vranckx, was despatched to the Hague. The negotiation had taken very nearly a year.

It was to be succeeded by a more important affair, which is opened in the following letter, written in Italian, from Rubens to Carleton.

"MOST EXCELLENT SIR,—Having heard from various people of the splendid collection of antiquities which Your Excellency has made, I thought of coming to see it with Mr George Gage, your fellow-countryman, but owing to his departure for Spain, and certain urgent business of my own, I had to give up the idea. However, since Your Excellency gave me to understand, through Mr Gage, that you wished to make an exchange with me of some of these marbles for some of my paintings, I should be very much disposed, as an amateur of antiquities, to accept any reasonable arrangement, if Your Excellency is still of the same mind. I cannot imagine a better way of coming to an agreement than by making use of the bearer of this letter, if Your Excellency will show him your collection, and allow him to make notes so that he can report to me. For my part, I will send a list of paintings in my studio, or I will paint what may be to your liking, especially for the purpose. Whatever

happens, we must arrange it so that both parties are contented. This gentleman is called François Pieterssen de Grebbel,¹ and is a native and inhabitant of Harlem; he is an honourable man, and one in whom we may place absolute confidence. With which I commend myself with all my heart to the good graces of Your Excellency, and I pray Heaven to grant you all happiness and contentment.—Your Excellency's very humble servant,
PETER-PAUL RUBENS.
“From Antwerp, 17th March 1618.”

This letter was followed by another, a little over a month later:

“MOST EXCELLENT SIR,—I have learnt, on the advice of my agent, that Your Excellency is disposed to negotiate with me in the matter of your antiquities. I have every hope of success in this affair, when I find that Your Excellency approaches it with straightforwardness, in letting my agent know the original price of your purchases, in which I trust absolutely on your word as a gentleman. I like to believe also that Your Excellency collected with the utmost discernment and the greatest wisdom, although, in selling as in buying, persons of your rank are most often badly treated. Very often, indeed, the buyer's title is counted on to the price of the object; but I am opposed to such a method. Your Excellency may rest assured that I will price my pictures exactly as if it were a matter of selling them for cash. I beg Your Excellency to have confidence in my word as that of an honest man.

“It happens that I have at present in my house certain choice works, including some that I kept for my

¹ Frans Pietersz de Grebber, a painter and picture-dealer.

own pleasure. I have others that I bought back for more than I sold them, but they are all at the disposition of Your Excellency, for I like quick dealings in which each party gives or receives his share in one stroke. To tell you the truth, I am so burdened and involved with orders for public and private works that I shall not be my own master for several years. Nevertheless, if we come to an agreement, which I hope will be the case, I shall not fail to finish as quickly as possible all pictures that are not finished, although they are in the attached list; and those which are finished (that is, the greater number) I can send at once to Your Excellency. In fact, if Your Excellency will resolve to trust me as I trust you, the matter is concluded. I am contented to give Your Excellency the works mentioned below, which I estimate to be worth six thousand florins at their present value, in exchange for all the antiquities Your Excellency has with you. I have not yet seen the list and I do not even know the number of objects, but I take your word for all that; I will send Your Excellency at once the finished pictures and a satisfactory title to the others, which I shall finish as soon as possible. In the meantime, I rely on what may be concluded by Your Excellency with Signor François Pieterssen, my agent, and I shall await your decision recommending myself with all my heart to your good graces and respectfully kissing your hand.—Your Excellency's affectionate servant, PETER-PAUL RUBENS.

"From Antwerp, 28th April 1618."

The list referred to was of twelve pictures, giving a brief description, the full measurements and the estimated value, with certain meticulously honest comments such as: "the eagle by Snyders"; "by my own

hand, except for a very beautiful landscape by a man who is extremely clever in this type of work"; "begun by one of my pupils but not yet finished. I shall retouch it entirely myself, so that it would pass for an original"; "by my best pupil,¹ and thoroughly gone over by myself"; and so on. Five of the pictures only were original.

Carleton replied soon after in a letter whose politeness is evidence of the esteem in which Rubens was held, for which reason, as well as because it relates clearly the progress of this affair, most of it may be given here. It was written in Italian.

"MY MOST DEAR AND ILLUSTRIOUS SIR,—The day before yesterday I received your very gracious letter of 28th April relative to my antique marbles, following on your previous letter of 17th March. On first consideration, in the presence of your bearer, of the list of pictures attached to your letter, I chose certain of them;² but having thought further in the matter, I find that the *Crucifixion* is too large for the low houses of this country and of England; in place of it, I will accept, if it please you as well, the *Saint Sebastian*. I shall not argue about the prices; I find them reasonable, since it is no question of copies or pupil's work, but of works entirely by your hand, as my antiquities are equally the work of masters.

"You will give me very great pleasure if you will trouble yourself to come here, where my house is at your service, before proceeding with our business, so that you may avoid buying a pig in a poke, as they say. If your occupations do not allow of this, and yet you

¹ Van Dyke, then nineteen years old.

² All originals.

still wish to make this exchange, be well assured that you will have in this collection of marbles the rarest and most precious of its kind which exists on this side of the mountains, whether in the houses of princes or private people. But for those who are always moving, as my occupation demands, such heavy things are not convenient, and, moreover, to make a frank confession, *homo sum humani nihil a me alienum puto*, our inclination changes sometimes, and mine has lately changed from sculpture to paintings, and especially those of Signor Rubens.

“And now, to fix our accounts and shorten the negotiations, since the number of pictures by your own hand is not sufficient—for altogether . . . they do not exceed in value three thousand five hundred florins—I have proposed to your agent François Pieterssen that you should pay half in pictures and half in Brussels tapestries, leaving out the *Crucifixion* for the reason I have given.

“If you agree to this suggestion, sir, it will only be a question of a few days, and so much the better for the satisfaction of us both; for you, sir, who wish for a prompt settlement; for me, who am obliged to go to England for a time towards the end of the month. . . . I kiss your hands very affectionately.—I am, sir, your most devoted servant,

“DUDLEY CARLETON.

“From the Hague, 7th May 1618.”

Rubens's answer was as follows:

“MOST EXCELLENT SIR,—Your very friendly letter of 8th instant reached me last evening. I learn from it that Your Excellency has partly changed your mind

in only wishing pictures for half the value of your marbles, and that for the other half you wish tapestries or cash, for, without spending cash I shall not be able to get these tapestries. This change seems to result from my list being short of pictures, for Your Excellency has only chosen my original works, by which I am most flattered. However, Your Excellency must not imagine that the others are simply copies; they are so well touched up by my hand that it is only with difficulty that they are distinguished from originals; and yet they are valued at a much lower price. In any case I do not wish to influence Your Excellency with fair phrases, since, if you had persisted in your first idea I could have offered you further originals up to the full value; but, to speak frankly, I imagine that you do not wish to burden yourself with so many pictures. The reason why I would rather pay with my pictures is evident. Although I have not over-valued them, they cost me nothing, and Your Excellency knows that one is more free with the fruit picked in one's own garden than with what one has to buy in the market; besides, I have spent this year several thousands of florins in building, and I do not wish, for a luxury, to pass the bounds of wise economy. After all, I am no prince, but one who lives by the work of his hands; that is why, if Your Excellency would accept pictures, either originals or well-retouched copies for the whole sum . . . I would treat you liberally. If, on the other hand, Your Excellency is resolved to have some tapestries, I will supply them to your satisfaction up to the value of two thousand florins, the remaining four thousand to be made up in pictures, three thousand for the originals you have chosen . . . and one thousand for other works in our

list which Your Excellency should choose, or else I will undertake to supply such originals as may please you. If Your Excellency will trust me you will take the *Hunt* mentioned in the list. I will make it as perfect as the original *Hunt*, which you already own, to which it will make an excellent pair. . . . In conclusion, I kiss, etc.,

“PETER-PAUL RUBENS.

“From Antwerp, 12th May 1618.”

Carleton agreed to these suggestions—namely, to take four thousand florins worth of pictures, and two thousand in cash for tapestries. The four thousand was to be made up of the pictures already chosen, the *Hunt* recommended by Rubens, a *Susanna*, and a little work to be specially executed. Carleton did not trouble Rubens to find the tapestries, but merely to advise him in the matter, at which Rubens was delighted. “I really have not a great taste for acting as go-between,” he wrote to Carleton in a letter clinching the arrangement.

Carleton wrote him again on the details of shipment, and concluded by saying:

“The *Susanna* must be beautiful enough to turn old men amorous; and I have no fear of the little work left to your discretion, knowing that it comes from a man of taste and honour. So I conform to the suggestions of your two last letters in all things, except that I will not admit the denial you express in the first of them: you are not a prince, you say, but I hold you to be the *Principe di pittori et galant huomini*, the Prince of Painters and fine gentlemen.”

There followed a series of letters dealing with details of delivery, passports, and so forth. In one of them Rubens wrote: "In exchange for marbles that will fill a room, you are getting paintings to decorate a palace, without counting the tapestries," which was a little vulgar and unlike the master: but he evidently did not feel it a bad bargain, nor mean any ill-will towards Carleton, because he added later in the same letter: "The mission you gave me (to advise on the tapestries) is so dear and honourable to me that I consider it a great favour. I will most willingly send Your Excellency my portrait, on condition that you, on your side, do me the honour of allowing me to have in my house some souvenir of yourself, since it is obvious that I must esteem Your Excellency more than you can me."

Two years later Rubens dedicated to Carleton the engraving of the *Descent from the Cross*, then, and perhaps ever since his most famous picture, as "a mark of gratitude and affection to his great admirer and protector."

Rubens was now the owner of a fine collection of marbles, most of which had been bought for Carleton the year before in Italy, sent to England, and thence to the Hague. They comprised twenty-one large statues, eight statues of children, a statuette of St Sebastian, fifty-seven heads, and thirty-eight fragments. Besides these, there were eighteen busts of emperors which had been bought for Carleton in Brussels. Rubens himself had already a small collection. He now built a circular room on to the garden end of the old wing of his house. It was similar to the Pantheon Temple at Rome, lighted only from the top, and fitted inside with niches. In this building he housed his collection. And so the

prince of painters became known throughout Europe as the owner of precious antiquities, one who dealt on an equality with nobles, and one to be consulted in antiquarian matters. In that way he avoided the contempt which learned men generally feel for artists.

The cordial relationship between Carleton and Rubens did not cease with the affair related. When Rubens was concerned shortly afterwards with obtaining copyrights for his engravings in Holland, Carleton used his influence to assist him. At first Rubens's request was refused on the grounds that he was neither a native nor an inhabitant of Holland, which, as he wrote to Carleton, "ought not to be much regarded, for such reason has never been alleged by either princes or governments." Rubens was beginning to understand these matters; already in a letter to Jacques de Bie, the engraver, who was acting as agent to Charles de Croy, he had remarked: "I like to be punctual in my dealings and to satisfy everybody, and especially my friends, but I know well that one does not always realise one's good intentions when princes are concerned." He had memories of a certain Vincenzo de Gonzaga. Now he had his word on councils: "It happens that although they have individually favoured a thing before, a great number of these lords being gathered together do exactly the opposite of what they had each privately promised."

Rubens's tact kept up with his growing knowledge of courts and princes. Bearing in mind the delicate position between the Spanish Netherlands, whose rulers he served, and the Dutch States, whose protection he sought, he cautioned Carleton to find out how the land lay before pressing his request, and, if he found that opinion was unfavourable, to withdraw it, because, for

certain high reasons, he did not wish to appear importunate. He understood that it would be most unbecoming for a distinguished servant of the Archdukes to be excessively suppliant to a government whose legal existence they would not admit. Rubens was yet to make use in large matters of the tact he was learning in small. Carleton was successful in helping Rubens in this affair of the copyright, and he also acted as a go-between for Lord Danvers with Rubens. It was in the treating of another, but very much less important exchange, namely, of a Rubens painting for Bassano's *Creation*.

The *Creation* was too large for Danvers, "for," he wrote, "our rounes ar littell in this cold cuntrye of England, and pleasinge peeeces to stand ten fowte hye sutes best." Danvers's picture was not in good condition and was not valued by Rubens at more than ten pounds; indeed he offered it to him back, or to anybody else, for fifteen ducats.

John Wolley, an Englishman on royal business in Antwerp, went to see the picture and reported to Carleton the truth of Rubens's statement, and that, when he suggested that Rubens could touch it up, the master answered: "I doe thincke I could doe as much as any other, but neither I nor any man els is able to mende it." Rubens varied very much in his estimate of his own powers. He could not fail to recognise his greatness, because not only praise but orders were showered upon him from all the most discerning amateurs and patrons; and yet in a certain mood he could speak of his "little talent for hard work" as all he had to put at the service of a prince, or say, on another occasion, "my talent is very slight, but I am among the best in eagerness and goodwill."

In the matter of the Bassano it was agreed that, since its condition was so hopeless, Danvers would pay something extra for the picture he wanted. Rubens painted him a *Lion and Tiger Hunt*, after a larger picture which he had sold to the Duke of Bavaria.

"Rubens confesseth in confidence," wrote Toby to Carleton, "y^t this is not all of his owne doinge and I now thanke him for this confession, for a man who hath but halfe an eye, may easily discerne it; but he protests y^t he hath touched it over all, in all y^e partes of it. I must confess a truth to yo^r Lo^p (though I know he will be angry at it, if he know it) y^t it scarce doth looke like a thinge y^t is finished and y^e colorito of it doth little please me, though upon y^e whole matter it be a gallant peece, for y^e desseigne of it is precious."

Toby found himself up against Rubens's rigorous business methods. Because he had been sent a bad picture, Rubens did not see why he should get a bad price for his own. The weakness of his case was in the fact that his own was not above criticism.

"I did, wth all y^e discretion I had," wrote Toby, "deale wth him about y^e price, but his demands ar like y^e lawes of Medes and Persians w^{ch} may not be altered. He valued, as he sayth (in a letter to M^r Trumbull) his Caccia at a hundred Philipps besides y^e Creation. I wish y^t letter had not been written, for I see it helps to oblige him to be unreasonable. Yet I was so imprudent as to offer him fifty Dukatts & so by degrees but y^e cruell courteous Paynter would not sett a less price upon it then before; but told me, as he sayd he told M^r Trumbull, y^t he would

referr himselfe to your L^{ps} curtesy. I told him plainly y^t I would not oblige you to such a proportion of expence, y^t I thought he might content himselfe wth less; y^t yow did but ordayne this picture out of a compliment to a friend of yours in England, and y^t if he would not consent I would tell your L^p in what case thinges stood, & what I had seen & what I had sayd, y^t your L^p might take your owne resolution. . . . If the case were mine, I would make no difficulty to send him fourescore Duckatts & to thinke y^t he might well be contented wth it. For verily though I had much use for such a picture, I would be very loath to give him for it 15 pound. Yet perhaps for so small a matter, you will not have him be able to say y^t you ar content to beate a bargayne wth him.

“Your L^p will have heard how Van Dike his famous Allievo is gone into England, & y^t the Kinge hath given him a Pension of £100 p^r ann. I doubt he will have caried y^e desseigne of his pieces into England; & if he have, I durst lay my payre of hands to a payre of gloves, y^t he will make a much better piece then this is for halfe y^e money y^t he asks. Perhaps I am deceived; but I thought fitt to tell your L^p playnly all y^t I knowe, or feare in this; though I doubt not but your L^p will dexterously govern the knowledge of it, for else this fellow will flye upon me. Yet please your selfe, for I am at a poynt.”

Poor Toby, he was finding that the prince of painters was as unreasonable as a tradesman; in fact, that when he asked a certain price for a work of his supreme genius, he expected to get it as a shop-man expects to get his price for a work of other men's mediocrity.

These agents continued to pester Rubens and haggle in a most unseemly manner. Rubens's last word was:

"Don't say that the painting is not worth so much; that is not my way of acting: if I had done the whole work with my own hand it would be worth easily double. Moreover, I did not just slightly touch it up, but went thoroughly over it. I confirm what I said, that although the picture is of that value, I shall be contented with what His Excellency the Ambassador thinks right and just to send me, because of the obligations I owe him."

Carleton, who, being a man of merit himself, knew how to treat men of merit, sent twenty-five pounds.

However, the unfortunate *Lion Hunt* pleased nobody. The English painters declared that it was scarce touched by Rubens. Danvers offered it to the Prince of Wales, who refused to have it in his gallery; whereupon Danvers wrote to Carleton begging him to get "the famous man" to do something worthier of his reputation. "Theas lions," he said, "shall be safely sent him back for tamer beastes better made." Rubens took the matter in excellent part, only complaining that Carleton had never made it clear to him whether he had wanted an original or a studio picture. However, he promised to paint "a hunt which shall be less fierce than that of the lions," and expressed his regret that Carleton should be displeased. He begged that he might be allowed to make the new picture larger. The idea of his painting the ceiling of the banqueting-hall at Whitehall Palace, then in course of construction, having been suggested, he added in his letter: "I confess that my natural inclination is to execute large

works rather than little curiosities. Each man to his gift; mine is such that no enterprise however great or varied in subject daunts my courage." This was really the key of the whole sordid business. The master of vast compositions, with so many important commissions on his hands and such enormous sums of money pouring in, was frankly bored with the trivial little picture, put out by the useless Bassano, and fidgeted by the haggling agents.

The end of it all was that he sent his portrait to Lord Danvers, for which the Prince of Wales had most urgently asked, and returned the Bassano somewhat restored.

CHAPTER IX

MARIA DE' MEDICI

WHEN Henri IV of France took as his second wife Maria de' Medici, "the fat banker's daughter" from Florence, it was not very much in the romantic way we have learnt to associate with that great lover and soldier. She brought a matter of six hundred thousand crowns to the white plumes of Navarre, which their gallant bearer urgently required at that moment for waging war against the hunchbacked Duke of Savoy. It was not to be expected that she, any more than her predecessor Marguerite de Valois, would control the King's wayward heart. She shared it with at least fifty-six sweet ladies, who, though Henri might have finished with them, remained as monuments to his amours under the titles of Marquise or Duchess, or, so suitably, Abbess.

This Maria de' Medici was the daughter of Francesco I, Grand Duke of Tuscany, and Johanna, Archduchess of Austria; she was the sister, therefore, of the Duchess of Mantua. A handsome, vulgar, and heartless woman, when her uncle Ferdinand, who had succeeded to the Grand Duchy, bought for her the Queenship of France, she did not concern herself overmuch with the fickle husband who was a necessary part of the contract. She merely quarrelled with him. She had brought her own lover with her from Italy in the person of

Concini, whom she raised to the rank of Marshal of France. She lived flamboyantly and intrigued for power; when her husband was assassinated she seized it and reigned as regent for four years, surrounded by an Italianised and sycophantic court. When her son, Louis XIII, came of age, he maintained the family tradition by quarrelling with his mother. He ordered Concini to be assassinated, his wife to be burnt alive, his son imprisoned, and Maria to keep to her apartments. She obtained permission to retire to Blois, whence she escaped to Angoulême.

Louis believed that he had effectually put his mother in her place and was reconciled to her after five years; but Louis was mistaken. The quarrel broke out afresh, and Maria raised an army against her son. They fought at Pont-de-Cé, but a certain wily priest, the Abbé de Luçon, arbitrated between mother and son, and peace was signed at Brissac. Maria returned to her dignity as Queen Mother, became President of the Council, and thought herself happy in the possession of that wily priest as her tool. Unluckily for her, he was to become Cardinal de Richelieu, and she was to be surprised. But the six years which intervened between the Peace of Brissac and the next troubles were, perhaps, the most peaceful of her life, and during them she was able to devote some energy to the old Medici habit of patronising the arts. In the time of her regency she had bought the hotel of the Duc de Piney-Luxembourg, on the left bank of the Seine. Now she pulled it down and ordered Salomon de Brosse to build her a palace more fitting her magnificence than the old-fashioned Louvre. This palace, modelled on the Pitti in Florence, was well advanced in 1620, and Maria resolved to decorate one of the great galleries with works that should

depict her illustrious career of squabbles and intrigues. She selected Rubens for the colossal task. He could not complain this time that he was set to the making of "little curiosities."

In January 1622, then, he was summoned to Paris. He went by Brussels where the Infanta Isabella confided to his care a little dog and a necklace of twenty-four enamelled plaques as presents to Maria, a less cumbersome baggage than Gonzaga had bidden him carry to Spain. This first visit was merely for preliminary discussion, and only lasted six weeks. Rubens lodged near the Pont Neuf on the quai St Germain L'Auxerrois. He inspected and admired the palace; painted Anne of Austria, the wife of Louis XIII, and Maria, whom he had last seen in Florence at her marriage by proxy; purchased silver on behalf of the Infanta; negotiated for pictures by Titian and Tintoretto on his own behalf; and discussed antiquities passionately with Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc.

This celebrated antiquarian was to be one of Rubens's most frequent and voluminous correspondents. He was, at this time, just over forty-one, a somewhat severe, shaggy-bearded, desperately earnest-looking individual. His family was of civic notability in Provence, where he had been born. He had made the customary round of colleges and universities, and travelled in Italy, England, and Holland; and in all of these places he had studied antiquities, and particularly coins, rather than the law for which he was intended. He eventually, however, became legal adviser to the parliament at Aix, a post which he was to hold until his death. His interest remained unspoilt by politics. He studied ancient and modern history, archæology, botany, zoology, astronomy, and philosophy. He col-

lected medals and coins, marbles, manuscripts, books, plants, and strange beasts, but not in the manner of Gonzaga with his crocodiles and musicians: he collected because he wished to pursue his studies at first hand; it was neither from a desire to show magnificently in the world nor even for a joy in beautiful things. He had discovered that as much might be learnt from crude or ugly work as from the most exquisite.

“Just as,” he wrote to Rubens, “travelling in your country and not finding a wine that agreed with me, I was obliged to take to beer, which at first seemed to me so bitter that I held my nose to drink it, as one does when one takes medicine. A few days later, having become accustomed to it, I found the taste much more agreeable, so much so that since then I hold it *in delitiis*, and almost prefer it to the best wines of whatever vintage.”

Just so he had acquired a taste for the barbarities of Gothic or any other art that could instruct him in history.

Rubens differed from him in this. His passion for medals, coins, cameos, and engraved gems—above all, for engraved gems—was mainly æsthetic. To Peiresc these objects were valuable in the study which he loved; to Rubens that study was valuable because it helped him to understand the objects which he loved.

“You have achieved,” Peiresc wrote to him, “the highest degree of perfection in that noble art which you profess; you surpass all others of this age—I do not say of all ages, lest I offend your modesty, but I am certain that you are equal to the most excellent masters—and that is why you cannot, without doing

yourself violence, subject your lofty genius to the consideration of objects of low worth that have come from barbarous hands."

In spite of this difference there was more than enough of common interest to bring these two men together. Peiresc was a great correspondent. When he died there were found in his possession more than ten thousand letters written to him by scholars and artists from France, Italy, England, Germany, and the Low Countries. His niece used them for lighting fires and making curl-papers. There remain, however, two volumes of these letters and six folio volumes of notes of his own letters.

Sometime before they met, this tireless letter-writer had asked Gevartius, a Flemish philologist and mutual friend, to put him in touch with Rubens. The painter and the antiquarian then began an exchange of polite and learned letters dealing mostly with cameos and medals.

Naturally, when Rubens came to Paris he was delighted to find Peiresc there. They became close friends, and after Rubens's return to Antwerp Peiresc carried on his negotiations for the Titian and the Tintoretto, looked after the despatch of his baggage, took certain measurements for him in the gallery of the Luxembourg, resolved many questions he put to him on details of the paintings, and kept him informed on political matters. Peiresc was glad to do these services for one whom he so honoured, not only for his genius, but for his nobility of character, his profound learning, his great personal charm, and the sweetness of his conversation—one whom he considered as "born to please and delight in all he says and does."

It was not likely that the calling in of Rubens for

the great work of the Luxembourg would be altogether satisfactory to French painters. They were stirred up by a certain archpriest, Nardi, who was jealous because the negotiations for the paintings, which he had opened, had been subsequently entrusted to other hands. Rumours were circulated that Maria had withdrawn the commission, and at length became so tiresome that the matter was laid before the Queen, who effectually silenced Nardi with the threat of a hundred strokes, as later she silenced envious critics by forbidding them under pain of disgrace to speak ill of Rubens. She was determined to be a patron in the high old despotic manner of Italy.

The principal agent in the negotiations was now Claude Magis, Abbé de St. Ambroise, afterwards Treasurer to the Queen-Mother and Councillor and Chaplain to the King. In his opinion there was no one in Europe except Rubens who was capable of so vast a work. "The painters of Italy," he said, "would not carry out in ten years what Rubens would do in four, and would not even think of undertaking pictures of the necessary size."

There were two galleries which Rubens had to decorate, and for which he was to receive fifty-four thousand francs certainly, and an extra six thousand if "the very high, very powerful, and very illustrious princess Maria" thoroughly approved of his productions. One gallery was to illustrate the life of Maria, the other that of Henri IV. The former was to be undertaken first. The subject, as we have seen, was not elevating: the space it had to fill was colossal. Down each side of the gallery, between the windows, were to be ten pictures, most of them thirteen feet high and nine feet eight inches wide; at one end

was to be a picture thirteen feet high and twenty-three feet eleven inches wide; at the other, over the doors and mantelpiece, eight-foot portraits of Maria and her parents.

Apart from these difficulties of poor subject and large space, Rubens had to suppress much in the life of Maria so that he might not offend her, and so to handle what he selected that he might not offend the King. Realism, in other words, would have been most dangerous. * Luckily Rubens had a predilection for allegory and myth, and he avoided all difficulties by smothering the Queen-Mother in Goddesses of Plenty, Peace, and Power, conducting her with sirens, giving her power over Monsters of Envy, Pride, and Disorder, habiting her as Pallas, and generally contriving to produce magnificent and noble works that had but the remotest connection with the fat banker's daughter. Luscious nude Fates spin her destiny; Graces and Muses attend her education; Angels bear her portrait to Henri de Navarre; Sirens escort her to Marseilles; Jupiter and Juno symbolise her marriage; Health and Plenty assist at the birth of her son. Mercury reconciles her with him on the first occasion; Valour strikes Discord with a thunderbolt on the second; Truth triumphs at the end. * But in a corner of the *Prosperity of the Regency* a satyr's head looks straight at us, "thrusts out his tongue and seems to warn us by his cynical smile not to take all this fine parade very seriously." ¹ Rubens was tactful but not a fool. Later, when he made studies for the life of Henri IV, a life that was worthy of his brush, he was sparing with gods and goddesses.

While Rubens was in Antwerp at work on the

¹ Hourticq.

pictures, the Abbé de St Ambroise asked Peiresc, on behalf of Maria, to obtain sketches of the projected work from Rubens. Peiresc very tactfully opposed this. He maintained that it would interfere with the subsequent liberty of the painter, that, if there were any objections, he would not be there to deal with them, and that, since several of the pictures were already finished, these objections would be useless anyway. The Abbé compromised by asking for sketches of the last five in the series, so that they could be modified if necessary, "from the political rather than the artistic point of view"; but conceding that they should not be shown until Rubens was present. Peiresc shrewdly suspected that the request was really on the Abbé's own behalf, which proved to be true. The Abbé ultimately became the owner of the sketches. Indeed, the Abbé, although such an admirer of Rubens, was something of a nuisance altogether, since he was the agent between Peiresc and the Queen-Mother, and very often professed to answer for her when he had not spoken to her.

When nine of the paintings were complete, Rubens showed them to the Infanta and the Court at Brussels. Everybody was delighted. Rubens then brought the pictures to Paris, arriving there on the 24th May 1623, in company with a pupil, Maximilien. He had been ready to start before, but Maria had gone off to Fontainebleau, and it was at first thought advisable to await her return; but after some delays and difficulties in making the arrangements owing to the bad humour of Cardinal de Richelieu and the purgings of the Abbé de St Ambroise, it was thought better that Rubens should not postpone his visit further.

Rubens, who never seemed to travel light, carried

with him, besides his paintings, a cabinet of medallions belonging to the Duc D'Aerschot, which was for sale. He himself had bought some of the medallions: Rockox had bought others: Peiresc had promised to dispose of the remainder, which he did to Jean de Lauson, Seigneur de Livé, and President of the Grand Council, retaining twenty-eight for his own collection.

The pictures were exhibited in a special room, of which the Abbé de St Ambroise kept the key, and only a very select few were admitted to see them. The plan was not to hang them in the gallery until all were ready, so that the full magnificence of the decoration should burst on the public in one clap. The Queen-Mother posted from Fontainebleau and "was satisfied beyond all expression, proclaimed Rubens the first painter of the world and expressed an unparalleled goodwill towards him." The Cardinal de Richelieu visited them on the next day, and, like all who saw them, even certain French painters, was prodigal of eulogy. Rubens, after five weeks in Paris, returned to Antwerp loaded with praise. There he continued his great task, while also preparing a series of engravings after antique gems which he proposed to publish, and concerning himself with the discovery of the microscope and some rather unintelligible meteorological instrument.

By January 1625 he could see his way to a final visit to Paris for the delivery of the remaining pictures, the hanging of the whole set in place, and their final retouching. He wrote to a friend asking him to retain the services of "the two ladies Capaño of the rue du Verbois, and also the little niece Louisa," of whom he wished to make three life-size studies as sirens. He thought these three ladies very suitable "not only for the superb expression of their faces, but also for their

wonderful black hair . . . and their figures." He expected to be in Paris in three weeks. In fact, he was there early in February.

He was not this time to profit by the care and courtesy of Peiresc. That learned man had left Paris during the plague in the August of 1623, and retired to Aix, where he had found that the better part of his collection of gems had been stolen. It was his brother, Palamède de Fabri, Seigneur de Valavez, who had then undertaken the honourable post of correspondent to Rubens in Paris and who now received him and cared for him. Peiresc wrote to his brother that he wished he were in Paris to stir up the Court to an attempt to retain in France "that pearl of honour, than whom there is no more amiable soul in the world."

The Abbé de St Ambroise had pressed Rubens's visit for early February, because the whole Luxembourg had to be ready for the marriage of Henrietta Maria, the Queen's sister, to the Prince of Wales; and Henrietta particularly wished to see the paintings.

For the next three months Rubens was busy, with the assistance of Justus van Egmond, in setting up and finally retouching his work. He was present at the marriage by proxy on 11th May, at which the Prince of Wales was represented by the Duc de Chevreuse, and at which Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld officiated.

"I lost all pleasure in the ceremony," Rubens wrote to Peiresc, "because of the misfortune which befell Monsieur de Valavez, your brother. He was with me on the same scaffolding, which was intended for the English in the suite of the envoys. There was a large number of people on it when, suddenly, under the enormous weight of the crowd, the floor broke and I saw your brother, who was beside me, fall with the

others. This was a great shock and grief to me; I held myself on to the end of the adjacent scaffolding where I remained safe and sound *ut solemus aliquandi duobus sellis sedere*. I had hardly had time to jump from the scaffolding, which fell, to that which stood, so that I was not able at that moment to see your brother, nor to get news of his fate, whether he was hurt or not. I was compelled to stay there in this anxiety until the end of the ceremony."

Of all the thirty people who fell, Valavez, as it turned out, was the only one hurt, and a flesh wound in the head was all he suffered.

Maria de' Medici was delighted with Rubens's work. The King also visited the gallery; it was the first time he had ever been in the Luxembourg, although it had been building for ten years. Rubens was not present on this occasion, because he was confined to his bed with a bad foot caused by an ill-fitting boot. The Abbé de St. Ambroise accompanied the King, "and explained the subjects, changing and varying the true meaning with great artifice"; and the King, also, was delighted.

Rubens had already prepared a scheme for the Henri IV gallery. "But," he wrote Peiresc, "Monseigneur the Cardinal de Richelieu is so busy with governing the State that he has not even had time for one look at it. I am therefore resolved, when I can get my payment, to go at once and leave to him and the Abbé de St. Ambroise the trouble of letting me know what is resolved, although they will spoil everything and get the sense upside down in their usual way. Perhaps in a year I shall have their answer in Antwerp.

"In fact, I am weary of this Court, and if they do

not satisfy me as promptly and punctually as I have served the Queen-Mother, it may be—I tell you this in confidence—that I shall not be easily fetched back here, although, to tell the truth, I cannot complain of Her Majesty's conduct up to the present; for the difficulties have been legitimate and excusable. But while I wait, time passes, I am far from home, and I suffer great loss.”

He did not wait long. At the end of the first week in June he set off from Paris. He could only find post horses, “poor beasts half dead, that had to be allowed to go forward alone three times, and be driven by the postilions in the manner of muleteers.” He arrived in Brussels on the 11th, but found that the Infanta, whom he wished to see, had gone to Breda, which had recently surrendered. He reached home on the evening of the next day, where he was received by an enthusiastic crowd of friends and relatives. He had brought back with him a silver credence, a present of courtesy from the English envoys.

The master had accomplished in three years one of the grandest and most difficult tasks ever set an artist; but once again he had tasted the weariness of courts and the procrastinating ways of princes and powers. In a letter to Valavez later in the year he said: “When I consider the journeys I made to Paris, and the time I stayed there without receiving any very considerable recompense, I find that this work for the Queen-Mother has done me little good.” What he thought of the French Court he subtly indicated in a letter to Pierre Dupuy.

“I am sorry not to have any interesting matter to

offer you in return for your news. Our Court is short of that commodity compared to the Court of France, which, by its greatness, is subject to the most important changes. Here we go on in the ordinary way, and every minister serves as best he can, without pretending to other favours than those of the rank he occupies, and so everyone grows old—and dies even—in the same office, without having hoped for extraordinary honours or feared disgrace. For our Princess shows neither great love nor great hate; she is sweet and kind to all. The Marquis Spinola alone has power. His authority is greater than that of all the others together; and he is, I think, a prudent, active, and diligent man. He works indefatigably.”

So now he who, as he once proudly proclaimed, “took all the world as his country, and believed himself welcome everywhere,” was best pleased to be home again in Antwerp, under this quiet rule, with Isabella, his wife, and little Albert, and his worthy Flemish friends. Supreme genius had the common touch.

CHAPTER X

RETROSPECT

DURING these years which had been largely occupied by his affairs with Sir Dudley Carleton and Maria de' Medici, Rubens had continued to produce work in vast quantities, had grown in wealth and fame and lordliness of character.

He had founded a flourishing manufactory of art. In his small army of collaborators, assistants, and pupils were men of such distinction as Frans Snyders and Paul de Vos, who painted animals for him; Lucas van Uden and Jan Wildens, who specialised in landscape; Jan Breugel, whose "line" was flowers; and Van Dyck, who was useful all round. At first, it seems, these collaborators regarded Rubens almost as *primus inter pares*. Breugel, for example, painted a picture of flowers and animals, which he described as "adorned with a Madonna and child by Rubens, who shows his talent . . . he is a man of merit and reputation." But a year later he writes of his flowers and animals as a mere frame to "a Madonna divinely done by Rubens."

But even when the Master's pre-eminence was undisputed he still allowed great liberty to his collaborators, although he kept his pupils close to his sketches. The most celebrated of these collaborators was, of course, Van Dyck. He had joined Rubens's studio

before 1618, when he was a lad of nineteen, although already a master of the Guild of St Luke. Within two years Rubens's patrons were stipulating for Van Dyck as an assistant in the work which they were commissioning: notably, this was done by the Jesuit fathers when ordering the ceiling decoration for their new church. "Rubens was very fortunate," said Bellori in his *Vite de' Pittori* (1672), "in having discovered a pupil to his mind, who was capable of drawing his pictures for the use of the engravers, as he did in the case of the *Battle of the Amazons*. He rendered him no less service in painting. The Master, in fact, being unable to fulfil the great number of commissions he received, employed his pupil to transfer his compositions to the canvas and to carry out in paint his drawings and sketches. It is said that Rubens made quite a hundred florins a day, thanks to the facility in working given him by Van Dyck's assistance, while Van Dyck derived a still greater profit from the lessons of an unrivalled master in his art."

In 1620 an attempt was made to induce Van Dyck to come to England. An unknown correspondent of the Earl of Arundel wrote in the July of that year: "Van Dyck lives with Rubens, and his works begin to be almost as much admired as those of his master. He is a young man of twenty-one; his parents live here and are very rich; it will be difficult to persuade him to leave, particularly because he sees what an immense fortune Rubens is amassing." However, later in the year, Van Dyck acceded to the wishes of Charles I, and his business association with Rubens ceased, although they continued to be friends.

But in spite of all these assistants, a very great deal

of work remained for Rubens to do. Although he was the supreme painter of life in its most vigorous and joyous aspects, the painter of magnificent women and jolly, healthy old toppers, of dance and song and virile passion, he was in his own life almost austere, devoting himself to his art like some fierce mediæval saint, but with no ugly fanaticism and no parade of self-martyrdom. He appeared before the world as a debonair and dashing cavalier, rich, famous, and witty. "He was tall, of majestic bearing, with regular features, red cheeks, chestnut hair, and eyes that flashed with a temperate fire; and his manner was laughing, sweet, and sincere."¹ Yet he was no worldling. He got up, summer and winter, at four o'clock in the morning, and after hearing Mass, he laboured all day in his studio, while the classics were read to him. He saw no frivolous company, but only his grave and learned friends, and them only when the light had failed; he never gambled and he ate and drank little; his sole recreations were an hour with his engraved gems, his marbles, or his pictures, and a daily ride on his Spanish jennet or his white-maned dapple-grey or his bay with white forefeet and the white blaze on the forehead.

A Dane, one Otto Sperling, who visited him in his studio, has left a striking description.

"We paid a visit to the very celebrated and eminent painter Rubens, whom we found at work, and, while he went on with his painting, listening to a reading from Tacitus and dictating a letter. We kept silent for fear of disturbing him; but he spoke to us, without stopping his work or the reading or the dictation, and answered our questions as if to give us proof of his powerful faculties. Then he ordered a servant to conduct us

¹ De Piles : *Abrégé de la Vie des Peintres*. Paris, 1699.

round his magnificent palace and show us his antiquities and the Greek and Roman statues, of which he owns a great quantity. We also saw a vast room, without windows, lighted by a large opening in the middle of the ceiling. A number of young painters were gathered there, each engaged on a different work, for which Monsieur Rubens had given him a pencil drawing, touched with colour here and there. These young people must carry out these pictures in paint, when Monsieur Rubens will finish them off."

There are two things we may regret in the life of Rubens, two imperfections to set against all his greatness. The one was a certain hardness in money matters. It never amounted to actual meanness; his magnificence and generosity prove that. It was no more than a rigid determination to have what was due to him, as he himself was most particular to pay what was due to others; it was a blemish that a banker would call a virtue. The other was a tendency to regard art merely as work; to be satisfied if he fulfilled his obligations, even though it was with inferior productions; to measure his genius at so much the day—a hundred florins, to be precise—to bow to the orders of inferior men of superior rank; in fact, generally to behave like most of the Masters. He was prepared to furnish pictures at all prices, from small studio works at fourteen florins eight sous to enormous altarpieces by his own hand at three to four thousand florins. He was prepared to patch his work to fit a frame. Thus he wrote to the Duke of Bavaria in the matter of a faulty measurement:

"I console myself with the hope that the difference is not so great that one cannot easily remedy it by

adding at the top or bottom some little thing or other which will cover the gap, without spoiling the symmetry of the whole."

When the Countess of Arundel, with her dwarf, her fool, and her dog, arrived at his studio to be painted, he did not find at hand a large enough canvas; but supreme genius made no hullabaloo; supreme genius was content to make sketches on odd pieces of paper and transfer them afterwards to canvas. And when later, after the picture was finished, the Earl of Arundel turned up and wanted to be put in, supreme genius meekly found a place for him in the composition. The result was one of the world's masterpieces of group portraiture.

But this blemish even, this excessive obligingness, a banker might consider a virtue in one who lived by the work of his hands. It was certainly a virtue that he had neither the arrogance nor fussiness of so many petty daubers. And besides, the manufactory was not open to all; "he sent stupid amateurs to bad and cheaper painters, since he did not lack buyers for his own costly work."

Rubens's palace had more dear inhabitants than pupils and assistants. Isabella Brant shared the private thoughts, hopes, and little troubles of the great man, whom we, like the world of his day, know only as a public figure, the Master. And there were his children. The eldest, Clara Serena, had been born in March 1611, and baptised at St Andrew's, with brother Philip as godfather and Clara de Moy, her grandmother, as godmother. She died when she was twelve years old, and Peiresc wrote to Rubens:

"I cannot but share the sorrow you must have felt at the death of your only daughter, who had already so many good qualities. Your wife's grief must have increased your own, by adding to your pain that of seeing the mother's sufferings. You are not one of those who need consolation, for you know how ephemeral is human life, and what kindness God often shows us in taking a child from earth to give it new life in Heaven, instead of exposing it to long illness, unhappiness, or trial, more cruel to a father's heart than death in the years of innocence. You should rather praise God for having so long preserved her to your love, and that will perhaps suffice to gain you a greater measure of the divine grace and blessing."

These foolish reflections, made with pathetic sincerity by the dry old scholar, can have been but poor balm for the hurt and tender heart of the master-painter of little children. His keen mind may well have questioned why the good God gave life at all, merely to snatch it away in an afterthought.

However, there remained to console him, far better than illogical pieties, two chubby boys, Albert and Nicolas.

Albert was born on 5th June 1614, and made a Christian with the Archduke Albert for godfather, and his aunt, Clara Brant, for godmother. His father soon began to draw him, adding to one sketch the legend, "*Cupido ex Albertuli mei imagine*" (Cupid after my little Albert). And of course he set him to study the classic languages, so that when he was only thirteen he published a Latin panegyric on the Duc d'Aerschot. Gevartius appears to have been his tutor, since Rubens writes to him:

"I beg you will put my little Albert, like my own portrait, not in your sanctuary nor among your household gods, but in your study. I love the boy, and most fervently recommend him to you, as to my best friend and the high priest of the Muses, that you may care for him . . . during my life and after my death. . . . I have always found him full of goodwill. . . . He is too young *si natura ordinem servet* to go before us. God grant him life that he may live well *neque enim quam diu, sed quam bene agatur fabula refert*, for it is no question of long life but of good life."

Nicolas, the second son, was baptised at St James's, with a Genoese noble for godfather. He, too, was often drawn and painted by his father, although he never seems to have equalled the first-born son in his affections.

Apart from the activities already recorded of those years, little happened to Rubens in the way of day-to-day incident. He visited Brussels on one occasion to paint the Archdukes; on another occasion, some years later, to paint Vladislas Sigismond, Prince of Poland: he was in Louvain in March 1617 probably on business connected with his pictures for the churches there. Such were the trivial disturbances of his arduous and wonderful daily round in Antwerp. Only one seriously unpleasant incident marked its triumphant regularity. Among Rubens's engravers was one Luc Emiel Vosterman, a Dutchman by birth but a citizen of Antwerp. He was a man of extraordinary powers who had published his first engraving at the age of twelve. He had joined Rubens about 1618, when he was twenty-three. After three years of successful collaboration, Voster-

man's mind became temporarily deranged: he began to proclaim that it was his name, and not that of Rubens, which gave value to the prints he executed. This jealous obsession grew so extreme, that he quarrelled with the Master and eventually attempted his life. Certain friends of Rubens were so shocked and terrified by this occurrence that they addressed a petition to the Privy Council that the magistrature of Antwerp should be ordered to guard him; and the Council took so serious a view of the danger, that they acceded to this petition. In Paris the rumour was spread that Vosterman had succeeded. Peiresc was greatly perturbed, and his feelings were shared by the Abbé de St Ambroise, Richelieu, and the Queen-Mother. It was afterwards believed that the rumour had been started by some envious artist, who hoped to influence Rubens's negotiations with Maria. Such a method had been tried before, as Rubens informed Peiresc, by rivals who spread tales of his death or illness "with no regret except that they lied." Some similar rumour was abroad again in Rome in 1624.

Nothing came of the genuine incident which had given rise to the false rumour, except a final break between Rubens and Vosterman, who went to England shortly after, where he worked for Van Dyck. After a life of tragic collapses and heroic fresh starts the unhappy engraver died in Antwerp, a pauper and a very old man.

In 1622 Rubens published a work on the architecture of Genoese palaces, under the title *Palazzi di Genova con le loro piante ed alzati*. It was issued in two parts, and contained a hundred and thirty-nine plates after drawings by the Master. He wrote a dedication to Don Carlo Grimaldi, a Genoese nobleman whom he

had met when staying in Genoa with Gonzaga, and a short preface in which he said :

“We are witnesses of the ageing, and gradual disappearance in our country of that style of architecture which is called barbarous or gothic ; we note how men of taste are introducing, to the great honour and embellishment of their land, that architecture which has true symmetry and conforms to the rules established by the ancient Greeks and Romans. We see examples of this in the magnificent churches which the venerable Society of Jesus have recently built in Brussels and Antwerp.

“It is right, no doubt, that for the dignity of religion they have begun to change the temples to a better style ; however, we must not neglect to consider private buildings, which, taken together, form the body of the city.

“Moreover, the domestic convenience of a house is almost always in concord with the regularity and beauty of its form.

“I believe, therefore, that it is in the interests of the people in all provinces this side of the mountains to publish certain designs of houses in the superb city of Genoa, designs which I collected during my Italian travels.”

He went on to explain that he had chosen the private palaces of Genoa as more suitable to his purpose of encouraging building in Flanders, than the princely palaces of Florence or the “famous palace built by the Queen-Mother in the Faubourg de St Germain at Paris,” which was, of course, the Luxembourg. He modestly admitted that his measurements were not accurate, his object being merely to give a general idea of the appearance of those Genoese palaces, and he

concluded by saying: "All beginnings are feeble; my effort will perhaps encourage others to do more."

Rubens also occupied himself during these years with politics, principally in connection with negotiations between Flanders and Holland, although they cannot have been of great importance; they were, however, sufficient to give the Infanta an insight into Rubens's diplomatic powers, and so satisfactory as to gain for Rubens a pension of ten ecus a month "on the citadel of Antwerp"—that is to say, out of the funds supplied by Spain for the royal army. That was in 1623: in the following year he received a still more notable honour. On 29th January, Don Inigo de Brizuela, bishop of Segovia, President of the Council of Flanders, submitted the following memorandum to the King of Spain, now Philip IV:

"SIRE,—Peter-Paul Rubens, painter to the Most Serene Infanta Doña Isabella, sets forth in his application that he is of honourable descent, that his ancestors have ever been Your Majesty's most loyal vassals and have occupied important positions; that his father, a doctor of law, was an alderman of Antwerp, and Philip Rubens, his brother, was secretary of that city; that he, the petitioner, has applied himself to painting since infancy; that, to improve his art, he has visited various countries; and that, because of the great experience and knowledge which he has of his art, the Most Serene Archduke Albert appointed him his painter with a yearly salary of two hundred ecus. He prays Your Majesty to deign to grant him letters of nobility, without payment of costs, since he is a member of the household of His Highness.

"The petitioner Peter-Paul Rubens is excellent in

his art, and much esteemed throughout Europe. Many princes have tried to draw him away from Antwerp by promise of great honours and great wealth. Since, moreover, he is the issue of honourable parents and faithful vassals of Your Majesty, and adds literary talent and the knowledge of history and languages to his rare merits as a painter, and since he has always lived splendidly, having the means for that, it seems that Your Majesty might deign to favour him with the nobility for which he prays, and dispense him from the costs.

“Your Majesty will decide as he thinks proper.”

On the 5th June the patent of nobility was issued. Philip, by the Grace of God, King of Castile, of Leon, of Arragon, of the two Sicilies, of Jerusalem, of Portugal, of Navarre, of Granada, of Toledo, of Valencia, of Galicia, of Majorca, of Seville, of Sardinia, of Cordova, of Corsica, of Murcia, of Jaen, of Algarba, of Algeciras, of Gibraltar, of the Canary Islands, and of the East and West Indies, of the islands and dry lands of the Ocean, Archduke of Austria, Duke of Burgundy, of Lothier, of Brabant, of Lemberg, of Luxembourg, of Gueldres, and of Milan, Count of Hapsburg, of Flanders, of Artois, of Burgundy, of Tyrol, Palatine of Hainault, of Holland, of Zeeland, of Namur, and of Zutphen, Prince of Zwave, Marquis of the Holy Roman Empire, Lord of Frize, of Salins, of Malines, of the cities, towns, and countries of Utrecht, of Overijssel, of Groeningen, and dominator of Asia and Africa—in short, Philip of Spain, saluted all men, and repeated to them the claims to nobility of his dear and well-beloved friend, Peter-Paul Rubens, and thereby granted to him and his issue “the title and degree of

nobility"; remitted him from all costs in the matter, and granted him as arms—party per fesse, or a bugle-horn sable cantonnée of two cinquefoils, azure, a fleur de lys of the first, the helmet open and barred, the mantlings and torse or and argent, and for the crest the same fleur de lys or. The chief quarters of these arms had been borne by Rubens's paternal ancestors as nobility of the robe.

Shortly after this, Rubens was created a Gentleman of the Household to the Archduchess.

Thus the son of Maria Pypelinckx grew in honours and dignities, yet, strangely, kept his honour and his dignity uncontaminated, and, though he trafficked with the great, he yet possessed his soul. And now he had need to hold it tight, since he was to plunge deep into the sea of politics.

CHAPTER XI

POLITICS: PROLOGUE

FOR some two years before the conclusion of his work for Maria de' Medici, Rubens's history had become involved with that of Europe. The chronicle-play in which the "pearl of honour" was now to act a distinguished rôle was far from new, and was somewhat blemished with dishonour in high places.

The Netherlands, originally independent states, owing allegiance to the Dukes of Burgundy, had passed to the Emperor Charles V, who had transferred them to Philip II of Spain, the husband of Queen Mary Tudor, who, in turn, had handed them over to the care of Margaret of Parma, his sister. It was under her rule that the religious risings had occurred which had led to old Jan Rubens's flight from Antwerp. Then, as it has been recorded, came Alva, whose atrocities incensed William the Silent, Prince of Orange. William threw aside his old conciliatory attitude, and in the spring of 1568 the revolt of the Netherlands opened with an army of natives, French Huguenots, and Germans, commanded by Louis of Nassau, defeating the Spaniards at Heiligerlee. The struggle dragged on with varying success for intolerable years. In 1573 Alva was recalled to Spain at his own request, and was succeeded by Requesens, who attempted conciliation. He offered constitutional

government to the Netherlands if they would accept Catholicism. William of Orange refused, and the war continued. Requesens died after three years of hopeless effort, and William fought on in desperation, with the remnants of his followers. Then suddenly the Spanish troops mutinied, pillaged the states which had surrendered, and wreaked on Antwerp that "Spanish Fury" which left her so shattered and woe-begone. The Netherlands were once again united in angry revolt. Catholics and Protestants together refused, by the treaty known as the Pacification of Ghent, to admit the new governor, Don John of Austria, Philip's bastard brother, unless all Spanish troops were withdrawn. Don John acceded to this on condition that the states left the religious matter in Philip's hands. The compromise was accepted. This was in the year of Rubens's birth. But it was soon discovered that Don John intended to capture the Netherlands for himself. This time the Catholic states revolted under the leadership of the Archduke Matthias, brother of the Emperor Rudolph. Don John defeated him at Gemblours, but shortly afterwards died suddenly and perhaps not naturally. He was succeeded in his troublesome charge by Alexander of Parma, who became reconciled with the Catholic states of the South. The Northern States now combined under the title of the United Provinces: this was in 1579. Three years later they accepted the Duc D'Alençon, brother of the French King, as Duke of Brabant and their leader. This was in the hope of securing the support of Elizabeth of England, who was supposed to be marrying D'Alençon, whom she called "the Frog." In the following year this ill-favoured and miserable wretch tried to play the traitor

and hand over the chief cities of the Netherlands to Spain. He failed, and soon after happily died. Within a month William the Silent, the splendid hero of sixteen years of struggle, was foully assassinated; but still the brave revolt he had so heartened went on. At last Elizabeth, who had so long shilly-shallyed, sent her help to the Netherlands, but too late to save Antwerp, which had been besieged long and fiercely. The Earl of Leicester was given the command, with strict injunctions not to accept the government of the United Provinces if it should be offered; it was offered, and he promptly accepted it. But he did little, only scoring the one famous victory of Zutphen, more famous for the death of Sir Philip Sidney than for any results it produced. Leicester did not remain long in his delicate position; he returned to England and took over the nominal command of the land forces that awaited the Armada. Shortly before his death in 1598 Philip II granted independent sovereignty to the Catholic Netherlands, and gave them to the Infanta Isabella and the Archduke Albert. Still the dreary, magnificent war continued. At last, in 1609, a truce of twelve years was signed between the new king of Spain, Philip III, and the Archdukes on the one side, and the States-General of the United Provinces on the other. When the end of the twelve years was approaching the Archduke attempted to persuade Philip to extend the truce, which he refused to do unless the United Provinces would open the Scheldt to navigation, renounce all commerce with the East Indies, and withdraw their troops from the West Indies. War was not immediately undertaken, and negotiations of a sort dragged on.

A certain lady, Bertholde van Swieten, widow of

Floris van T' Serclaes, a friend of the Nassaus and of the Archdukes, undertook an attempt to bring about a reconciliation. She interviewed Maurice of Nassau, Prince of Orange, and informed the Archdukes that he was willing to treat for the submission of the United Provinces, if a statesman were sent to the Hague. She had evidently misunderstood Maurice or had been somehow deceived, since when Peter Pecquius, Chancellor of Brabant, was sent for this purpose, he received the answer from the Prince that the United Provinces were free, and proposed to remain so. The House of Orange seemed to have a faculty for strength; the spirit of the murdered Prince survived in his successor.

In August 1621 Spinola, in command of the forces of the Spanish Netherlands, crossed the frontier with his army; but still the poor negotiations were kept alive, and Rubens helped in the desperate effort. The Archduke Albert had died in that year; the Catholic Netherlands had reverted to the crown of Spain, and Isabella was now no more than Governor. In that unenviable position the successor of Margaret of Parma, of Alva, and Requesens, Don John and Alexander of Parma "listened every day to the advice on this matter," as the French ambassador at Brussels assured his Government, of the great painter, who was to prove himself so willing to leave his beloved work, if he could help to bring about peace in the world.

Rubens was pacific by nature; he hated public wars and private quarrels equally. He imitated great lords only in their splendour, detesting certain of their habits like a good citizen. In a letter to Valavez he wrote:

"I thank you for telling me of all these duels. This mania of the French really ought to be suppressed: it

seems to me the curse of the kingdom, and that it will wipe out the flower of its nobility. Here we fight against foreign enemies, and the bravest is he who bears himself best in the service of his King. . . . Those who think to gain credit by private quarrels, are excluded from all military office and honour, and that, to my way of thinking, is the true remedy for the evil; for all these disordered passions have no other causes but ambition and a false love of glory."

And how much Rubens disliked war even in the public cause his whole life of diplomacy was to demonstrate. So now, in his present work of pacification, he went busily backwards and forwards between Brussels and Spinola's camp. It was so that he became intimate with the great general. In a letter to Dupuy, some years later, when Spinola had been in Paris, Rubens wrote:

"I am happy to learn that the Marquis is leaving your court with a good opinion of it. He genuinely deserves, in all points, to be treated as a most worthy man, as I can testify from my familiar intercourse with him. He is the wisest and most prudent person I have ever met, and never lets his intentions be guessed. He is not eloquent, but rather through the fear of saying too much than through any lack of fertility or intelligence. I say nothing of his courage which is known to all the world; I myself distrusted him at first as an Italian and a Genoese, but I have learned, on the contrary, to know him for a sure and safe man, who deserves the most entire confidence. As for my Gallery (the Medici Gallery) His Excellency did not trouble to go and see it, having no taste for painting, which he understands no better than a porter."

In August 1624 Spinola invested Breda, an important Orange stronghold. On 15th October an English agent wrote to Secretary Conway:

“I will begin with a secreet treaty for a peace, or a truce ; managed by Petro Paulo Rubens, the famous painter ; betwene the United Provinces, and those that are nowe under the Kinge of Spaine’s obedience. An argument (in my poore opinyon) although they make themselves suer of Breda, and esteeme it as good as taken already that they are weary of the warres and would be content to suspende their armes. . . . The Marq. Spinola is determinately resolved either to winne Breda, or in the trenches before it, to bury his corps and his honor.”

A letter from the new King of Spain, Philip IV, to the Infanta, written two days before, confirms this rumour. But, alas ! for the heroic efforts of Rubens, we hear no more of it. The siege was pressed for ten months and then at last Breda fell. But Rubens was not beaten. We cannot tell on what lines he was pushing his negotiations, since they were rigidly secret and the very few documents relating to them are almost unintelligible. They refer to terms of which we can know nothing and indicate people by numbers. We do, however, learn that Rubens’s passionate desire for peace had run him full into the most intricate net of policy, in which he appears to have been wonderfully at ease. Thin ice, to change the metaphor, was a ground that suited his dexterity and subtlety of mind. He skated on it in Dunkirk, where the Infanta Isabella was staying, in the September and October of 1625; he cut figures somewhere on the borders of Germany

with some unidentifiable prince; he sat on it in Brussels with the Infanta right up to the February of 1626, lodging at the Golden Lion. But, long before this, the common touch had reasserted itself, and he had "grown weary of being so long away from his home." Even the carnival had left him somewhat bored, though he saw the Marquis de Campo Lataro maintain in the lists against the Prince of Barbanson that Florinda, his mistress, was unique in beauty and virtue. "The trappings and dresses of the cavaliers were very beautiful," he wrote to Valavez, "but they jousted without skill, and as if they were little used to it." Anyway, he was not of the breed that gladly suffers mediæval revivals.

So the courtier-painter once more quitted a court with pleasure, and exchanged the company of a sovereign Isabella for that of a wife Isabella. But for all too short a time.

There is little to pity in the life of Rubens. Few men have climbed so steadily, and with so few sorrows, to immortal triumph. Yet even he could not escape the dagger-thrusts of death. He had ridden post-haste over Europe, to weep on the tomb of his mother; he had seen his brother and his little daughter go out before him. On 20th June 1626 he gave the last, bitter kiss to Isabella Brant.

A month later he wrote to Pierre Dupuy, who had succeeded Valavez as his Paris correspondent :

"MOST ILLUSTRIOUS AND HONOURABLE SIR,—You do right to remind me of the power of destiny which does not bend to the caprices of our passions, and which, as an effect of the supreme will, needs render us no account of its decrees. It commands as absolute

master; we obey as slaves, and we have nothing else to do, as I understand things, but to make that slavery less hard and more honourable by submitting without protest. And yet, at this moment, that duty seems to me very hard, nay, almost unbearable. Your prudence bids me rely on time. Perhaps it will do for me what reason should do, for I cannot pretend to achieve that Stoic passivity; and I cannot even believe that feelings so just can be contrary to human nature, nor that we must regard with equal indifference whatever happens in the world. I am convinced *aliqua esse quæ potius sunt extra vitia quam cum virtutibus*, and that these causes bring with them into our souls a sort of feeling *citra reprehensionem*. Truly, I have lost an excellent companion; I could—what do I say?—I was bound to cherish her with reason, for she had not one of the faults of her sex; no little tempers, no feminine weakness, nothing but goodness and delicacy; her virtues made her dear to everybody during her life, and since her death there is universal sorrow. I find such a loss very painful, and, since the only remedy for all sorrows is the forgetfulness born of time, I must look to that alone for healing. But it will be difficult for me to separate the grief I feel for the loss of her from the memory that I must treasure all my life of this woman, so loved and respected. A voyage, perhaps, will be the only way to distract my attention from so many things that renew my sorrow, *ut illa sola domo mæret vacua stratisque relictis incubat*. The changing scenes which are offered to the eyes by a voyage fill the imagination and ease the sorrows of the heart. For the rest, it is true *quod mecum peregrinabor et me ipsum circumferam*; but, believe me, that it would be a great consolation to me to have the pleasure of seeing you and

your brother, or of doing something that would please you. I am deeply moved by the friendly sympathy that you have shown for my trouble, and I thank you most sincerely for the correspondence you promise me in the absence of Monsieur de Valavez, and I will remain all my life your very obliged and very humble servant.—Your illustrious, etc.,

“PETER-PAUL RUBENS.

“From Antwerp, 15th July 1626.”

It was part of the vital, sane philosophy of Rubens never to look back for long. Years later, writing to Gevartius on the death of Gevartius's wife, he said: “It is better to set oneself to forget, than to be for ever recalling the past.”

According to the strange custom of the time and country a vast banquet was held to celebrate the death of Isabella, at which the members of the Guild of St Luke and of the Town Council were present. It cost two hundred and four florins eleven stuyvers, a shocking sum to us who can see our dead home on a few sandwiches and a bottle of cheap wine.

Rubens, lacking, as he confessed, any disgusting degree of stoicism, and not being able to achieve it even though Don Gaspar de Guzman, Count-Duke D'Olivarez, First Minister of Spain, urged it on him in phrases that a less eminent person might possibly have chanced upon, left Antwerp and the cruel memories that the beauty of his home kept alive. We do not know where he went, or for just how long, on the voyage in which he sought “to ease the sorrows of his heart.” The Master could not escape the common touch.

Anyway, he was back home in August in time to see

the Dutch fleet from the towers of Antwerp and the warning beacon on Notre Dame, and to hear the cannon-fire from the citadel: he could be present at the *Te Deum*, which thanked God for their repulse and for the victory of Spanish arms over the King of Denmark, who was allied with the Dutch, at the battle of Lutter.

He remained quietly in Antwerp for three months, watching, and recording in his letters to Pierre Dupuy, the course of events—the naval engagements, the digging of the great canal that was to drain off the Yssel and other tributaries of the Rhine, and leave a dry passage into Holland; the sailing of the treasure galleons from Peru carrying twenty millions in gold, guarded by all the power of Spain, their captains under orders to sink rather than surrender, and wearing round their necks a papal dispensation from the consequences of suicide, so that there might be no mistake at the Seat of Judgment. But Rubens the painter, meanwhile, continued his work and his dealings; he sold a hundred thousand florins' worth of pictures and treasures to the Duke of Buckingham, and early in December 1626 he went to Calais to meet the Duke's agent, Balthasar Gerbier, to settle the details of the sale. At least, that was the ostensible object of their meeting, but it was not the only one. They were to open secret negotiations for peace between England and Spain. The war dated from the discreditable affair of the Anglo-Spanish marriage proposal. It had been proposed, in 1620, to reconcile the old enmity between the two countries by marrying Charles, Prince of Wales, to the Infanta Doña Maria, daughter of Philip III. Rubens had been somehow involved in those negotiations. In the March of 1623 the

Prince and the Duke of Buckingham had crossed to Spain in disguise and arrived suddenly in Madrid to carry off the Princess. King James remained at home, chuckling over the thought of "Steenie and Baby Charles sallying forth like 'dear adventurous knights worthy to be put in a new romanso.'" He sent after them the robes proper to be worn on the feast of St George, "for he thought it would be a goodly sight for the Spaniards to see his two boys dine in them."¹ Prince Charles swore on the gospels to marry the Infanta, to become a Catholic, and to allow complete liberty to Catholics in England. Buckingham ignored Spanish etiquette, insulted the proud hidalgos, and allowed his followers to behave generally like boors. Feeling ran high. When the Prince left he made it clear to the English ambassador, the Earl of Bristol, that he was to hold up the negotiations. In the next spring James informed Philip that the marriage was off, and that Prince Charles was to marry Henrietta Maria of France. War, of course, broke out. James sent six thousand men to the support of the United Provinces against Spain. Although he died in 1625, his successor, Charles, continued his policy. In November he sent Buckingham and Lord Holland to the Hague, where they concluded a treaty with the United Provinces and Denmark.

"And truly," wrote Rubens to Valavez, "when I consider the caprices and the arrogance of Buckingham, I pity this young king, who, without any need and through bad advice, throws himself and his people into such an extremity; for it is easy to begin a war, when one wants to, but it is not so easy to stop

¹ Trevelyan.

it. . . . As to Buckingham . . . he is heading for the precipice."

Rubens now entered on this scene of history, which high and faithless men had made discreditable; he was to labour for peace with fools and knaves, whose only aims were their own advantages, and to carry himself wonderfully through the tangle, lofty and uncorrupted.

CHAPTER XII

POLITICS: HOLLAND

THIS Balthasar Gerbier, with whom Rubens now had to deal, was a man of about thirty-five, a native of Middelbourg. His parentage was uncertain, although he published what professed to be his genealogy. He had studied painting in Holland, but after entering into relations with Buckingham in 1616 he had turned to politics. He had become master of the horse to the favourite, and accompanied him to Madrid for the "romanso," and afterwards to Paris for the marriage by proxy of Charles to Henrietta. It was there and on that occasion that he had first met Rubens. He was then already embarked on his long career of slippery intrigue. Even after Buckingham's death, Charles was to continue to trust him, and to show it by dining with him, an honour which was to cost Gerbier a thousand pounds. Others were to trust him, and to have their secrets sold for good round sums. Then he was to be politically disgraced, and begin a movement for founding pawnshops, which was to fail. Then he was to open an academy in Bethnal Green, where he was to profess sciences, and languages, and exercises, fortification, cosmography, the arts, elocution, and virtue; a kind of Dotheboys Hall. This also was to fail. Then he was to return to Holland and politics; but shortly afterwards to sail to Suriname as a planter,

where one of his daughters was to be killed, the rest ill-treated, his house sacked, and himself bundled back to Amsterdam. He was to return to England after the accession of Charles II, and end his varied days as an architect. Luckily Rubens was to die many years before that, in the innocent belief, which he shared with so many, that the man he had trusted and befriended was worthy of that honour. Pawnshops and charlatan academies consort oddly with the Prince of Painters, but he was too noble in his mind to suspect others whose protestations were noble.

On his way back from Paris to London in September 1625 Buckingham had visited Rubens at Antwerp and been deeply impressed with his collection. This was the origin of the offer he now made through Gerbier to purchase a large part of it. Three motives, it seems, suggested to Rubens that he might accept the offer. The Infanta Isabella had pressed him to get into close touch with Buckingham for diplomatic reasons; the sale would be an excellent mask for these proceedings. His wife was dead, and Rubens seemed for the time to have lost all care for his princely home; the sale would be a profitable opportunity for disposing of unnecessary treasures. His inclination, perhaps, had changed like Carleton's before him. "*Homo sum humani nihil a me alienum puto*," he might have written like him.

Rubens, then, went to Calais to meet Gerbier, who, however, did not turn up, and after three weeks he went on to Paris, which he reached on Christmas day, and where he found Gerbier. He stayed with the Flemish ambassador. After the preliminary negotiations were completed he returned to Antwerp by Brussels, reaching home on 28th January 1627, where

Gerbier visited him in the following month; but it was not until September that the whole affair of the sale was concluded. In Brussels he had learnt of another envious rumour spread about him—namely, that he had been in England, an enemy country, which it would have been graceless to visit without the Infanta's permission. He had some difficulty in dispersing the calumny.

In the meantime foreign affairs had grown daily more complex. All Europe was thin ice. Buckingham, not content with the unpopular Spanish war, had sought to conciliate English religious dislike for the French marriage by supporting the Huguenots and embroiling himself with France. "The English," wrote Rubens, "from their way of acting, might well replace the old device on their standard of St George, *Amyx de Dieu et ennemys de tout le monde*." Then there was the affair of the Palatinate. Elizabeth Stuart, Charles's sister, was married to the Elector Palatine, Frederick V, who had been called to the throne of Bohemia by the Protestant rebels. The Emperor Ferdinand II naturally objected to this seizure of his estates, and opened war on Frederick; so began the 'Thirty Years' War. Charles tried unsuccessfully to support his brother-in-law, and at last, in desperation at all these overwhelming complexities, tried to open negotiations with Spain. It was of these negotiations that Rubens had to treat with Gerbier. After his meeting with Buckingham at Paris in 1625 Rubens had held a long discussion with Gerbier, in which he had pointed out, among other things, that there was no quarrel between the Infanta Isabella and Charles, and that therefore the Infanta was an eminently suitable person to bring about a reconciliation with Spain. Gerbier had replied

that, if the Elector Palatine could be recognised as King of Bohemia, he had great hopes of such a reconciliation. Rubens communicated this to Philip, and was ordered to continue the negotiations. On 23rd February 1627 Gerbier wrote to Rubens, on behalf of Buckingham, to ask him if he could persuade the Infanta to obtain powers from Philip to treat for a truce of two to seven years, with full liberty of commerce between Spain, England, Denmark, and the United Provinces. Rubens replied that the Infanta must know whether Charles only wished her to deal with his own affairs, or whether he included the difficulties between the Emperor and Denmark. At the same time Spinola wrote to Gerbier assuring him that Rubens had his authority to negotiate. Rubens then submitted to Gerbier that it were best to conclude peace between England and Spain, and discuss other matters afterwards. That discussion was bound to take some time, and Philip could not at present answer for the Emperor or other German powers. The Palatinate affair, that meant, must stand over. Buckingham replied, in a memorandum forwarded by Gerbier, that though Charles took much to heart the troubles of his German kinsman, he agreed that the reconciling of England to Spain would be the best preparation for a general truce. He wrote :

“But what strickt confederacie the King of Great Brittain hath entered into wth the States of the United Provinces is verie wel known : so as from them in any treatie wth honor and justice hee can not deuide. And seeing the title of free states, for w^{ch} both sides make the warre, is so disagreeable to the King of Spaine, it may be so accomodated that the

King of Great Brittain, treating for a truce or a peace for himself and his confederats the States, that dispute may be declined w^{ch} might grow about the title."

But if the States would not endure that begging of the question, then, Buckingham went on to say, "consideration must bee had, whether the truce may not proceed in the same termes as formerly it did" (that is, in 1609). So matters might go forward if His Majesty's dear brother and sister of the Palatinate "bee provided for by sufficient authorisation from Spaine, at least, so farre as the credit and power of the King extends unto." Buckingham incidentally admitted in this document that the overtures had first been made by Rubens. It is not surprising in these circumstances that the French ambassador was warned to keep an eye on Rubens. France did not wish to be left high and dry as the only enemy of Spain. So began Rubens's diplomatic duel with the terrific Cardinal de Richelieu, the lord of France.

The Infanta, on Rubens's advice, applied to Spain for authority to treat, but of course the reply was long in coming. The Spanish court was not notorious for speed. In the meantime Rubens wrote to Gerbier proposing a meeting between them, together with Carleton and Scaglia. Carleton was then English ambassador at the Hague. The Abbé Scaglia was the representative of Charles-Emmanuel, Duke of Savoy. Rubens thought him "a man of subtle mind," and comparing him with Spinola, said: "They make a pair. Scaglia speaks well and often, but our Marquis speaks little; he is very reserved; he listens to everything but thinks no less for that." Scaglia had recently

been in England, but had now come to Brussels to beg the Infanta's influence with Philip of Spain on behalf of his master. The Duke of Savoy was in disgrace at the Spanish court because he had allied himself with France and Venice. Scaglia professed to have a treaty between England and France in his hands, but offered to hold it up for two months if Spain would hurry to be reconciled with England first. It so happened that, at that moment, Philip had signed a treaty with France for the conquest and partition of England. However, he was prepared to listen to proposals for any other shuffle. Listening involved nothing. Of course, neither Rubens nor the other negotiators for the English peace knew anything about the French treaty.

It may be that somebody at that time was clear what everybody wanted. But we, now, must be content with a bird's-eye view of an entangled criss-cross of genuine and pretended motives, a confusion of princes and powers dizzy with trying to look all ways at once like mixed fish in a net. No doubt each of them thought he knew a way into the open water, if the others would only let him lead; but the difficulty was, how much of the water each of them was to have when they all got there. So they went on squirming, and Mars held the net firmly.

At last, after seven weeks' delay, Philip answered the Infanta's request for powers to negotiate. He granted these powers, but only for the peace between England and Spain, and he ante-dated them by fifteen months. This was crafty in His Catholic Majesty. It meant that, if Louis of France should scent out these dealings, and want to know, pertinently, how it came about that Philip, who had just signed a treaty with him to partition

England, was now busy negotiating peace with that country, Philip could ingeniously reply: "Oh, those negotiations were opened fifteen months ago, long before any treaty with Your Christian Majesty." It meant also that His Heretical Majesty of England could be kept comfortably dangling, and Spain, as usual, could go on waiting for something to turn up. Philip also offered an armistice for a year to the United Provinces for the discussion of peace terms. He was prepared, he said, to give way on all points not touching religion or sovereignty. This was most hopeful, since the war was mostly about religion and sovereignty.

Let us sum up the monstrous position. England, Denmark, and the United Provinces were allied against Spain. The Emperor and the Elector Palatine were at war with one another. England was committed to the interests of the Elector; Spain to those of the Emperor. France and Spain were at war. France and England were at war. France and Spain had signed a private treaty to partition England. Scaglia held a private treaty between England and France. England, through Rubens, was negotiating a private treaty with Spain. Chaos was come again; and it was called diplomacy.

Besides these major complications, there were a thousand petty wars, treaties, or proposals for treaties afoot. As a typical example, the Duke of Savoy, anxious, as we have seen, to return into the good graces of Philip, suggested that his son should marry the daughter of the Duke of Mantua, and on the death of the latter, which might be soon hoped for, Philip could have Mantua. It was a pleasant peace-offering. If it came off it would invalidate Gonzaga's little effort

of the coach and seven horses and all the trials of supreme genius on that first diplomatic journey of years ago.

Without mentioning this matter, Philip wrote to the Infanta to tell Scaglia that his master of Savoy would be received with open arms if he would side with Spain in Italian affairs generally. In the meantime, Scaglia was to clear out of Brussels, and his master not to interfere with business which did not concern him; and "I think it well," wrote Philip, "to inform Your Highness that I much regret that you have had recourse to a painter to treat of such important affairs. It is the cause of great discredit, as may be imagined, for this monarchy, since there necessarily follows a loss of prestige when a man of such little importance is the minister whom ambassadors must seek out in such weighty matters. Though we cannot actually refuse to allow the proposer his choice of intermediary, since we are engaged to it from the beginning, and since England does not consider it harmful that that intermediary should be Rubens; none the less it is very harmful to our country."

To which the Infanta answered:

"Gerbier is a painter like Rubens; the Duke of Buckingham sent him here with a letter in his own hand for the said Rubens, and charged him to make the proposition to Rubens. One could not therefore avoid hearing him. Whoever opens these negotiations, if they go forward, it is obvious that the direction of them must be given to more considerable persons. I shall act, for the rest, as Your Majesty orders, setting myself to prolong the negotiations as much as possible without concluding anything."

That was promising. And, having thrown a sop to Spanish pride, the Infanta, who seemed to have imbibed common sense in Flanders, continued to trust and employ Rubens, as the King himself was to do later. The master was well out on the ice.

On 10th July 1627 he arrived at Breda, under a passport from the Prince of Orange, for the pourparlers with Carleton, Scaglia, and Gerbier. The sale of his treasures to Buckingham was still the mask. He wrote to Gerbier proposing that they should meet at Zevenbergen, a village near Breda. Gerbier refused, and proposed one of the large towns, Delft, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, or Utrecht, as places where their meeting would be less remarkable. Rubens replied that he had orders not to proceed any farther into Holland; Gerbier replied that he had orders not to proceed any farther towards the frontier. They could not agree, and Rubens returned to Brussels for fresh instructions. He was given permission to extend his travels in the enemy country. He visited several towns, and finally met Gerbier at Delft. Eleven days had been wasted.

Reporting to Lord Secretary Conway on 25th, Carleton related how Rubens had returned to Brussels "and immediatly had order from thence to come hether into Holland; where he now is, and Gerbier in his company walking from towne to towne upon theyr pretence of pictures: w^{ch} may serve him for a few dayes; so he dispatch and be gone: but yf he entertayne tyme long here he will infallibly be layd hold of or sent wth disgrace out of the Countrey: for here they can have no other opinion of theyr doings on y^e other side, but y^t all his fraude and deceit."

In a previous letter he had said that "the shadow of

Rubens's journey is look't through by all men of insight into affaires."

Rubens did not visit Carleton after all, because he had orders not to go to the Hague, and Carleton would not meet him elsewhere for fear it would "rayse much discourse." Scaglia met him at Delft for a day. These preliminary capers of the diplomats among the wind-mills of Holland read rather like a round game. It is difficult to realise that they had the fate of hungry peasants in their hands; that if they slipped homes would be burned and children slaughtered, and the old weary war drag on.

Carleton apparently did not relish all the rather ineffectual efforts at secrecy. He wrote:

"Because much romo^r is rayseed upon Rubens coming, w^{ch} was advertised hether from y^e first Inne he came to in Rotterdam, and will increase much in going, I have employed my nephew Dudley Carleton expresly to the Pr: of Orange, and such of the States he hath wth him in the camp to acquaint them wth all that passeth; to y^e end they should not enter into any misapprehension upon misreports that wee are here manadging some matter of secret in theyr absence: for in this ombragious tyme and place there can not bee too much circumspection used to prevent inconveniences."

Rubens, in his interview with Gerbier, according to the latter's report to Buckingham, said that little could be done until the arrival in Brussels of Don Diego Messia, Marquis de Leganes, who was to bring full instructions from Spain. Of course, being a Spanish envoy, he was long in coming. Finally the Infanta, "fearing that England would be irritated by the slow-

ness of Spain," sent Rubens "to assure Gerbier of her integrity, her zeal, and her sincerity of intention . . . and to learn whether there had been any advance in procuring the concurrence of the United Provinces, and whether the necessary expedients for facilitating the affair, in which the greatest difficulties and obstacles were those of Holland, had been considered."

Rubens said that Spain had written:

"You will continue to treat with Gerbier until Don Diego arrives, not only for an accord between Spain and England, but also in the affairs of Germany and Holland."

The Emperor had signified that he was quite content that German affairs should be dealt with. The son of Maria Pypelinckx had Europe in his hands. Alas, that Europe was so slippery!

Gerbier replied, in mixed metaphor, that the ball was at Spain's feet and it was for her to speak first. Nothing could be done without definite statements. Rubens went off, said Gerbier, "hoping for the arrival of Don Diego Messia as a Messiah." He had asked Gerbier to wait a month in Holland. In the meantime the Messiah was held up in Paris with a fever, or, as Carleton thought, a pretended fever. Rubens prolonged his stay in Holland until 8th August; he had been there about a month. He had used his time not only for political purposes, but also to visit the Dutch artists. Sandrart, the painter and historian of art, was then an apprentice in Honthorst's studio. He later wrote this account of Rubens's visit:

"Since his wife had fallen ill, he said, and the doctors'

cares had not been able to save her from a sudden death, he had travelled to Holland to forget his sorrow, and to visit the numerous and excellent painters of whom he had often heard and whose works he had seen. So he came to the studio of Honthorst at Utrecht, who received him well, and showed him everything he had there, among other things a Diogenes with a lantern in his hand, who in full daylight sought for a man in the crowded public square of Athens. Rubens was greatly pleased with the invention, but quickly observed that the picture was the work of one of the young assistant painters, of whom there were several. As he wished to know who had executed the Diogenes, Honthorst said, 'This young German,' and pointed me out. He at once congratulated me on this beginning, and encouraged me to continue and to study zealously. He examined the other pictures, also, with great satisfaction. As he also wished to visit Abraham Bloemart, Cornelius Poelenburg, and others, and Honthorst was prevented from accompanying him by a slight indisposition, he offered to send me with him in his place, which Rubens accepted with great pleasure. After Honthorst had given him a great banquet, he went on his journey to Amsterdam and other places in Holland, where he visited during fifteen days all that was of note there. I accompanied him on all the journey, happy to be able to enjoy the society of an artist who could so widen my knowledge of my art by his conversation, his advice, his words, or his works, and I accompanied him as far as the frontier of Brabant. I could tell a great deal about this journey and of his praiseworthy conduct, but I shall sum up all that by saying that as he has excelled in his art, so I found that he was perfect in every other

way, and that he was greatly esteemed by persons of the highest and the humblest rank. During the journey he praised, among other things, Honthorst's perfect style of painting in his night-effects, the noble drawing of Bloemart, the charming little figures of Poelenburg, which, in the style of Raphael, are accompanied by delightful landscapes, ruins, animals, and other accessories, and some of which Rubens commissioned for himself."

Rubens, back in Antwerp, waited restlessly for the Messiah. Gerbier, in Holland, was even more restless. He threatened to return to England, but Rubens managed to persuade him to wait a little longer. Gerbier then wrote to beg for "something in black and white" from the Infanta and Spinola to prove that the negotiations were not just privately between Rubens and himself.

"I assure you," he said, "that without that your credit and reputation, on which alone we embarked, will be greatly concerned and diminished in our eyes, which now is in such high estimation that unless you diminish it yourself, it will be of the greatest value on other occasions."

He went on to complain of the danger to his own reputation if the affair feebly petered out, with no evidence that it had ever been serious.

At last, on 9th September, the Messiah arrived—in a litter, a last, subtle ruse. The fever which had kept him in Paris had been a series of interviews with Louis XIII to arrange the combined assault of France and Spain on England. They had, incidentally,

suggested Spinola, the peacemaker, to command the wild enterprise. Spain had been up to her old tricks; the honest Infanta, Spinola, and poor Rubens had been double-crossed. Their prestige in England and all their hopes of peace had been shattered by the hysterical conceit and incompetence of the Count-Duke D'Olivarez, First Minister of Spain and her greatest curse.

Rubens, because he was a diplomat, could not express all his bitter disappointment and disgust, but he revealed them clearly enough in a letter to Gerbier dated the 18th September.

“I beg you to believe that I do all I can, and that I find my masters deeply interested in our affair, even though they are pinked and wounded by Olivarez, whose passion carries him beyond reason and reflection, as I can gather from Don Diego himself (though he tries to hide it). The majority of the Spanish Council was of our opinion, but his obstinacy forced them all to act on his. These are the scourges of God, who pursues His work by such means. We remonstrate so keenly with Don Diego that he begins to be disturbed and embarrassed. . . . I do not wish, under a pretence of friendship, to deceive you, but I will tell you frankly the truth, and I declare to you that the Infanta and the Marquis (Spinola) are resolved to continue negotiating, because they believe that the alliance between France and Spain will not come into effect, will produce nothing, and will not last. Moreover, all intelligent men here, churchmen as well as laymen, mock it. . . . We hope that Olivarez will open his eyes and do better work before it is too late. In the meanwhile keep things as they are, and hold

Buckingham to his favourable dispositions. That can do no harm. . . . *In magnis voluisse sat est, Diis aliter visum est.* . . .

"We believe that the League will be nothing but thunder without a thunderbolt, which will make a noise in the air without producing any effect. Signor Don Diego has recommended me to maintain our correspondence with vigour. He has been disabused of several things since his arrival here. . . . I pray God to employ us more successfully in future in this and other matters. . . ."

In a letter to Buckingham, of the same date, he wrote:

"If I had been as lucky as I was well-meaning in the affairs Your Excellency confided to me, they would be in a better state. I take God as my witness that I have acted sincerely, and have neither said nor written anything except with good intention, and by express orders of my masters, who did all they could, and would have succeeded, if private passions had not given way to reason . . . but they are resolved not to abandon the treaty . . . I beg you to believe, Monseigneur, that there is no trickery in their procedure, but that they act with zeal and affection for the public good."

Neither Rubens, nor the governors of his country, were easily beaten. They prepared the ground to build again when the silly winds of Spain should subside. And even Don Diego, the false Messiah, wished he had been a real one. On 4th October Lord Secretary Conway recalled Gerbier to England.

"His Ma^{te} thinkes it agreable to his hono^r and service to suspend any further proceedings in that treatie."

The curtain was rung down on Rubens's first act in the European theatre; the plot had thickened and the ice had thinned. The interval was to be less than a year.

CHAPTER XIII

INTERVAL

“SURELY it would be better if these young people who govern the world to-day could only be friends instead of troubling all Christendom with their caprices.” The Master had expressed this simple wish to Valavez back in the beginning of 1626. And still the absurd confusion persisted. Again, a year later, he was saying to Dupuy: “I wish all the world were at peace, and that we could live in an age of gold instead of an age of iron.” And yet again: “The affairs of Flanders are insignificant and of little importance in comparison with those of Germany and France. But truly we are tired, and we are so hardened to suffering that the war seems to us endless.” In these quiet sentences he showed his deep resentment, and we understand why he could leave his easel to struggle in the ugly arena of politics. He was too great a man not to be sensitive, tenderly sensitive, to the daily agonies of Europe, even to be lashed to bitterness in spite of the vast serenity of his mind. “The states to-day,” he cried, “are governed by men without experience, and incapable of following the advice of others; they do not carry out their own ideas, and they do not listen to those of others.”

And indeed things went badly, and all the news he had to give Dupuy in his Thursday letters was of wars

and rumours of wars: of how Grol fell to the Prince of Orange, or the Danes were defeated by Spain; of how the soldiers at Santvliet were up to their knees in Flemish mud, and no quarter was given at sea; of how winds and rains and fires battled with the poverty-stricken, hungry peoples of Europe. And of his own city he could only report the poor truth: "She languishes like a body stricken with consumption, and dying little by little. Each day the number of her inhabitants diminishes; our unhappy people cannot support themselves by their habitual industry or commerce. We must hope for some amelioration of these evils which our own imprudence has caused, unless we work according to that tyrannical maxim: it matters not if our friends perish so our enemies be destroyed. But even that plan does not succeed, for our misery far surpasses the little harm we do our enemies."

But still afflicted genius marched on, painting masterpieces, exchanging long opinions on antiquities with the scholars of Europe, dreaming, like Wren, of a well-proportioned city arising on the ruins of fire; planning a journey to Rome to buy engraved gems and classical marbles, a journey to Provence to worry out long questions with old friend Peiresc, and to see the relics of the ancients there. Though it seemed to him that his world was breaking up, he still fought for peace, and followed his great appointed path.

One old connection in particular was breaking up. Rubens's first patron, Vincenzo Gonzaga, had died in 1612; two Dukes had died since, and then the Cardinal Vincenzo had ruled Mantua, and died without legitimate issue. Now rival cousins disputed the dukedom, supported against one another by the Empire and by

France. Over the body of the poor little independent state yet another war broke out. In four years Rubens was to learn of the sack of the splendid palace where he had lived, and the ruthless pillage of the city where he had been young. Remembering those days, he was to write: "I never received from the princes of that house anything but good treatment." Great men easily forget petty complaints; and Rubens said of himself: "I am not one to feed on grumbling, and I imagine it is the same with all men of worth."

Already, on 7th October 1627, the Junta, the Spanish Council of State, had grown dissatisfied. At a solemn meeting they discussed the situation. It appeared that France had formed an alliance with the United Provinces. Cardinal de Richelieu did not regard his red hat as any reason for adjusting his policy by religion. The one thing he was resolved on was that there should not be an accord between Spain, England, and the United Provinces, which would leave France dangerously on her own. In other words, Rubens and Richelieu were again pitted against one another.

Now perfidious Spain was learning the perfidy of France. Had France not sworn to join in that little expedition to conquer England, and had she not now allied herself with England's ally and Spain's enemy? The Junta recommended that the negotiations with England should be pushed further by the Infanta, so to answer perfidy with perfidy. At the same time the preparations for the attack on England were to continue. At the same time a private truce with the United Provinces should be broached. Thus these subtle statesmen, whose great aim seems to have been to do nothing and to appear to do everything, muddled the issues and confounded the confusion. And they were not

satisfied with Rubens. "He might," they reported to the King, "without doing wrong to truth, have answered with less clarity." Clarity was certainly not popular with the dark hidalgos.

In the meantime, Buckingham had personally undertaken his tragi-comic expedition on the Île de Ré, in support of the French Huguenots, who were besieged in La Rochelle. "It seems to me," wrote Rubens, "that his own temerity has put him in such a position that he must either win or die gloriously. If he outlived his defeat, he would be nothing but the toy of fate and a thing of contempt to his enemies. . . . The Duke of Buckingham will learn this time that the profession of arms is very different from that of courtier." He learnt it, leaving half his force behind him and forty English standards to be hung in Notre Dame.

The English need for peace with Spain was now desperate. . . . As to Buckingham, he was heading for the precipice. . . . Both Scaglia and Gerbier approached Rubens to reopen negotiations. Rubens forwarded their letters to Spinola, with the somewhat disillusioned comment that he did not imagine His Excellency could give anything but the very vaguest answers. Spinola replied that he had shown all these letters to the Infanta, who had ordered him to take them to Philip. Spinola was preparing to visit Madrid to deal with the entanglements of the situation verbally. He assured Rubens that the Infanta and he were still the friends of peace with England. He went to Madrid on 3rd January 1628 and was never sent back to the Low Countries. He was too honest and direct a man to be favoured by the Spanish powers of the day.

In that same January, Josias de Vosberghen, resident of the King of Denmark in Holland, and a close friend

of the Prince of Orange, visited Rubens on his way to England. Gerbier described this gentleman as "a strange microcosm who is always fuller of air than earth." He made clear to Rubens the community of interest between England, Holland, and Denmark and begged him to obtain authority to open negotiations with all three. He spoke elaborately of his own powers and schemes. Rubens wrote to the Infanta asking for this authority, which she apparently did not grant. She ordered him to communicate the affair to Spinola, which he did, expressing little hope that it would lead to anything. Spinola agreed with him. Vosberghen did not impress anyone.

Then Gerbier and Scaglia got at Rubens again. They ingeniously proposed that Philip should treat for peace with England "and her allies," thereby avoiding the difficulty of describing the United Provinces, whether as free States or subject States.

On 29th February the Junta met in the hotel of the Count-Duke D'Olivarez to consider the letters Rubens had forwarded to Spinola. They also placed little confidence in the interference of Vosberghen, the "strange microcosm," since he had no definite powers, but they advised that Rubens should be instructed to keep him and everybody else on strings without committing himself. And this, the King instructed, was not to be an official reply to Rubens, but as if accidental. There was no more talk of the conquest of England: the wind was veering: but as usual Philip wanted to sail all courses at once. When Rubens reported this "accidental" reply to England, Charles I officially authorised Vosberghen to treat with the King of Spain or his ministers, but, as Gerbier said, "in the opinion that his alchemy would go up in smoke, seeing the

inconstancy of his spirit and imagination." Indeed he failed to work miracles, even with the authority of the Martyr King. One particularly comic incident much prejudiced his reputation. Gerbier described it to Carleton: "He came early one morning as Post haste, Post haste for the King's service, demanding to see the Duke. But not finding the way so open as before, he wrote him saying, 'Sir, I must speak to you at once, and be heard by the King and you alone, for it is a matter of preserving the King of Denmark and the King of Great Britain.' On which the Duke, thinking that legions of armies had fallen like hail upon our shores, gave him prompt audience, and all he had to say was to show a letter from Rubens which he had kept in his pocket for ten days after I had received a letter from Rubens of the same tenour." And thereupon Gerbier called him the poor microcosm and "Archifanfaron" and a "fatti-vento," a rattle.

In the meantime Rubens dutifully tried to get Scaglia out of the negotiations. He remembered that Philip was not favourable to the interference of this diplomat, but Gerbier insisted that Scaglia had great credit in England, and that it would be unfair to exclude one who had already troubled himself so much in the business. Reporting this to Spinola, Rubens agreed that Scaglia neither ought to be, nor could be, set aside.

On 14th April the Earl of Carlisle was sent to be, conjointly with Carleton, an ambassador-extraordinary to the Hague. On his way there he called on Rubens at Antwerp, but found that he was in Brussels. Carlisle was not allowed a passport to Brussels. Rubens, however, returned. In a long letter to Buckingham, dated 6th June, Carlisle reported their meeting.

“At my comeing unto Antwerp (upon saturday the 17 May curr^t), I fownd that Don Carlos de Coloma, and Mons^r Rubin were out of towne, gone the day before unto Bruxelles. . . . The day following after dinner, taking occasion to see some curiosities at Mons^r Van-digs (Van Dyck), I met Mons^r Rubin there, newly returned from Bruxelles; which I knew not of, until that instant. . . . M^r Rubin employed the best of his wittes, the residue of that afternoon (when I met him) to discover my inclination towards Bruxelles, withall bewraying a great and g^rall desire on that part of my coming thether; which I fownde also trew by many other hands; on my part haveing discovered thus much in him, I resolved to make him plainly aske mee the question (Whether I would goe to Bruxelles or no?) and so without approaching nearer to this purpose, after supper wee parted for that night.

“The next morning (May 19-29) againe very early he came unto mee before I was ready, and then directly asked mee whether or no I would goe to Bruxelles? Whereunto I answered that his question seemed strange unto mee, becuse himself knew, that by his pen I was discharged from goeing thether; a thing I wondered, could escape the wisdom of th’ Infanta & the M. Spinola; since without any hazard, they might have had much honour & advantage therby. But it well resembled (so I told him) all the other proceedings of Spaine with K. James (of Bl^d Memory) and his Ma^{ty} my most Gr: Sovereigne: For presently after he (M^r Rubin) had made a prop^{on} and overture of peace, Don Diego de Mexia tooke occasion to make a league with France (their ancient enemies by nature & necessity of state) against us, with whom

they offred to treat, a work as false and foolishe as ever nation was guilty of. In like sort, haveing graunted me a gr̄all Passeport, wich was an act of courtesie, they p̄rently restrained mee from Bruxelles, and offred to valewe themselves by it unto France, for so they have done. Wherby haveing somewhat astonished him, I told him farther, that for demonstraṓn that they but still doe, as they have formerly done, I myself could well remember. In the first place, that after the King of Spaine had twice begged a peace of the King of England, and was twice refused, and the third time had obteyned it, upon condition the Treaty should be first made & sworne in England, and after sworne in Spain; for corroboration therof, a proposition was tendred & sollicitated by themselves of a mariage, between the (then) Prince Henry and y^e first daughter of Spaine, who most perfidiously was afterwards given unto the French King: Secondly to repaire themselves, they made a second prop^{on} of mariage, between the second daughter, & the King my most Gr: Mast^r, and with what artifices the infamouse treachery hath been caryed, I leave the world & God of justice to judge: th' Inheritance of my Mastr^s sister & her children, being taken away under colour of y^t Treaty, whilst himself in person went into Spaine to seek the Lady. At which Mons^r Rubin said, that his Ma^{ties} brother in lawe, with his party had been th' Incendiaries, & brought this misery upon themselves. Nay, said I, that Spaine and her complices were th' Incendiaries, I shall prove unto you, or let mee lose the credit of a freind & honest man. This accordingly I proved with so many demonstraṓns as he said, he much wondred how I came to knowledge of so many of their secret papers. It would be tediousse to repeat the particulars, because better

knowne unto yo^r Lord^p then myself: after which he smileing said, he could say no more then, *si jus violandum, regnandi causa violandum*. Wherunto I said, but now compare these proceedings with yo^r last, How under pretence of treating a frendship, you have combined with our p^rent but yo^r eternall enemy, & haveing given me a gr^all Passeport, you restrayne mee afterwards from comeing to Bruxelles; the one contrary to all honesty, the other contrary to civility, discretion, & yo^r owne advantage: *he confesset heer that the Marquis Spignole and the Infanta did both blush and abhorret that act of Don Diego Messias* and that the sole cause of my being debarred from Bruxelles was to keep secret from France the Treaty of Peace they intended with us, and for feare that Spaine should suddainly think that it was wholly concluded (a man of such quality as myself comeing thether); which answers I made appeare to be of so small force, and so im^ptinent, as he seemed very much to greive at the cariage of these things, and made mee belive that (for his particular) nothing but good intentions & sincerity have been in his heart; which on my soul I think is trew, because in other things I finde him a reall man, *and as wel affectet to the king of England's service as the king of Spaine can deseyer*. Heer Mons^r Rubin added for assurance of their sincerity, That *the Marquis ded sent a dispatce de same day from Spaine*, which he himself (Rubin) had sent unto yo^r L^p in England; wherin for his part he thought there was nothing but reality, & that wee should trust unto nothing, but visible effects. Of this yo^r Lord^p is best able to judge, haveing *the dispatche* in yo^r owne hands. I shall only put yo^r L^p in minde that for certaine *Spaine doth much desire a peace with the King of England* for many and pressing reasons *whereof Italy*

afordeth not the least for they have kindled a ware there being well prepared."

That was Carlisle's story. The Infanta, in a letter to Philip IV, told a different. According to her, it was Carlisle who solicited for permission to see her at Brussels. Whichever was true, the affair was odd, since they had nothing to exchange but compliments. In a letter to Dupuy, Rubens said of Carlisle: "He seemed to me little disposed in our favour; to tell the truth he is almost the leader of the opposite party, though very disgusted with Cardinal de Richelieu: one may say of him, that, though false in his affections, he does not hide his dislikes."

In the meantime Philip had written for all Rubens's papers relating to the peace negotiations, to which Rubens had replied that being largely in cipher they would need his detailed explanation. Could not some authoritative person be deputed to whom he could hand them over personally? On 4th July the Junta met and advised that Rubens himself should be sent for, to bring the letters to court. The King endorsed this advice, but added: "He must not be pressed; it is for him to decide whether it is in his interest to make this journey."

At the end of August, Rubens, having committed his house to the care of William Paneels, his pupil, and carrying his own papers and all others relating to the affair which had been preserved by the State, set off for Madrid. He passed through Paris, but could not even call on his friends because of the great secrecy of his mission. He rode post over the dusty, glaring roads of high summer, and though he stopped on the way to inspect the siege operations at La Rochelle, he

arrived in Madrid in the second week of September. The curtain was rung up again.

But one of the chief actors had left the scene. A poor English lieutenant of the army that had left its honour on the Île de Ré, a poor starving, black-visaged fanatic, tramped his way from London to Portsmouth where the English fleet waited for a fair wind to carry it on another attempt under the same commander. The black-visaged fanatic, Felton by name, found out the commander and drove his dagger home. Buckingham, "the darlinge of fortune," had gone over the precipice.

CHAPTER XIV

POLITICS: SPAIN

RUBENS's visit to Spain caused great speculation and perturbation among the diplomats. The Papal Nuncio at Madrid, Giovanni Battista Pamphili, Patriarch of Antioch, wrote off to the Cardinal Secretary of State after Rubens had been there some days: "It is held as certain that the Flemish painter has some negotiation in hand, for it is known that he confers often and in secret with the Count-Duke and in a different manner from that which his profession would suggest. They say he left England a little time ago; and as he is a great friend of Buckingham, it is believed that he comes with some treaty of peace between the two crowns. Others think that the principal matter with which he is charged is the truce with Flanders and that he has received the mission, as one who enjoys the confidence of the whole of that country, to make known the feeling of the nation on that affair." The Nuncio was not far out. Others guessed less happily. The French envoy, writing from Brussels, even mistook his destination; he reported that he was gone to Venice to meet Carlisle. Peiresc was no wiser; he told Dupuy that he was going to Italy. But Chifflet guessed closer: "Rubens has gone to Spain," he wrote, "whither he is said to be commanded to paint the King, but from what I learn from reliable quarters he is charged by Her Highness

(the Infanta) in the affairs of trade with England which he is negotiating." It is evident that in spite of Rubens's great discretion he was known to be somehow involved in important politics, and his movements were counted as significant.

Rubens had no very high opinion of the court to which he was now come. He had written to Dupuy: "When anyone who is dealing with the Spaniards turns his back, they profit by it to defer carrying out their promises. . . . The King and the ministers of Spain appear to be in a profound lethargy. They seem deaf to warnings."

The principal personages with whom Rubens now had to deal were the King and the Count-Duke. Philip IV, though he had a long, doleful countenance and always wore the royal black of Spain, had little in common with the inquisitorial fierceness of his predecessors. He was mentally lazy, and delighted only in luxury and pleasures. His mistresses were many, and he was indifferent to whether they were court ladies or common prostitutes off the streets of Madrid. Yet he was not a bad man; he was too good a shot, too brilliant a horseman, too dashing a hunter to be softened by his excesses; too naturally affectionate and kindly to be spoilt by his infidelities. But, when his empire was bleeding to death, he could not exert himself to staunch the wounds. He was not a bad man; but he was an abominable king. Rubens's subsequent opinion of him was expressed in a letter to Gevartius:

"Personally I have nothing but pity for the King. He is gifted by nature with all qualities of mind and body; in the daily intercourse I have had with him, I have learnt to know him thoroughly well: this prince

would certainly be capable of governing under any difficulties, if he did not distrust himself, and too much respect his ministers. Now he must suffer the blame of his own trustfulness and for the folly of others, and be the victim of a hate which should really be directed elsewhere. . . . *Sic visum superis cum nobis.*"

Philip's chief minister was the Count-Duke D'Olivarez, a man just turned forty, therefore ten years older than the King, the second son of a noble and diplomat, Count Hendriquez. He had been intended for the Church, but on the death of his elder brother he had left the seminary and married his hideous old aunt Iñes de Zuñiga. He had served at the court of Philip III, and on the accession of Philip IV in 1621 he had become, like Richelieu in France and Buckingham in England, the King's first minister and his master. He was created Duke of San Lucar; then Grand Master of all the military orders, Grand Chamberlain, Grand Marshal, and Grand Chancellor of the Indies, all which grandeur was highly profitable. But he had the Spanish trick of gloom, living ascetically, and constantly lying down in his coffin while black monks chanted the *De Profundis* over him. He was hot-tempered, overbearing, and stern. He worked furiously, but he was entirely without political genius. Spain crumbled as fast under his desperate fingers as it had under the pacific fingers of Philip III. These two men, Philip IV and Olivarez, so different yet both so unfortunate in their destinies, were alike only in their love and patronage of art. They are tragic and pitiful figures in the tragic and pitiful history of Spain.

Rubens was not the only one to be moving in the peace negotiations. Scaglia, with Gerbier and two

others, arrived from England at the court of Brussels. The policy of England, or rather of the King of England, had not been altered by the murder of Buckingham. However, since the discussion of this peace must necessarily be prolonged, Charles was ready to conclude a separate truce with Philip. Buckingham had said: "Let us make our peace with Spain and arrange the affair of the Palatinate, and then the Dutch will do what we want." The question of Catholic liberty in England had better be left over; it might break the negotiation; and besides, Charles did not want fresh trouble with his people. So did Scaglia report the views of the English crown, and added the proposal that the eldest son of the Elector Palatine should marry a daughter of the Emperor. Moreover, he assured the Infanta that Charles would arrange for a Catholic to succeed him in England, though that must be kept quiet for fear of English opinion. Gerbier confided in the Infanta that the English Privy Council were unanimously for peace with France; therefore, if peace were to be made with Spain there must be no delay. Charles had little time to spare for betraying his country. The two envoys who had accompanied Gerbier and Scaglia then went off to Spain to keep an eye on Rubens, and Scaglia followed in the January of 1629 as Ambassador Extraordinary of the Duke of Savoy to Madrid.

In the meantime the Junta had met, and Rubens had laid his proposals before them personally. They had advised that the negotiations should be pressed forward. However, Spanish pressing was never excessive, and Rubens set quietly to work, painting. He had an apartment in the palace, and the King came to visit him almost every day. He spent little time with the

Spanish painters, whom he still regarded with the contempt he had learnt on his previous visit. He formed only one friendship among them, and that was with Velasquez, who was then twenty-nine, and with whom he had corresponded before. "Rubens praised his work very highly because of his modesty. They visited the Escorial together," said Pacheco, Velasquez's father-in-law. But another reported a worthier judgment: that Rubens declared Velasquez the greatest painter there was, or ever had been in Europe—a rarely handsome tribute from one who himself might claim the same description.

Already by early December Rubens had painted the whole royal family, and he had made innumerable copies after Titian. A man of fifty-two, a statesman, and a Master, he was still ready to go to school to the dead giants, though he might shirk the Latin grammar. At the end of that month he wrote to Gevartius, beginning his letter in Flemish:

"That I answer in Flemish will show you clearly that I do not deserve the honour you do me by your Latin letters. My practice and studies in the humanities are so forgotten that I should have to begin by asking permission to commit solecisms. I beg you not to send me back to the school benches, a man of my age."

He went on to report, a little sadly, his failure in certain classical researches in the libraries of the Escorial. "My manner of life and my studies draw me away, and my ruling genius drives me far from the secret sanctuary of the Muses," he said; but by that time he had fallen into irreproachable Latin, in which

he continued the letter with only here and there a sentence in Flemish. He gave little news except of delays, but he recorded one great disaster, the capture of the Spanish fleet by the Dutch, a fleet carrying twelve million florins. He did not know, then, the exact details. "However," he wrote, "it is only too true, according to public opinion, that the loss is immense, and it is imputed to folly and negligence rather than bad luck, since, after so many warnings given at opportune times to prevent this misfortune, no care was taken. You would be surprised to see almost everybody here in the highest glee because they think they can use this political calamity to throw shame on their rulers and to satisfy their spite against them. So great is the violence of this hate that it makes people forget their own misfortunes in the pleasure of vengeance."

By the end of April the Spanish pressing had gone so far that a decision had been arrived at. Philip announced it to the Infanta in a letter dated 27th. It was that Rubens should go to England, with instructions to negotiate a truce on behalf of the Infanta, to whom Philip thereby gave authority, and whom he promised to repay "punctually and with all diligence" any expenses that might be incurred.

On the same day that he wrote this letter Philip, because of the good report that had been made to him of his dear and well-beloved Rubens, and because of his sense, *idoineté*, and sufficiency, trusting in his wisdom, loyalty, and good diligence, and so on and so forth, nominated Rubens Secretary of his Privy Council, with the right of succession to his eldest son and the enjoyment of all honours, rights, liberties, exemptions, profits, and emoluments usual

and belonging to that office. And in the meantime he gave Rubens a ring worth two thousand in Brussels ducats.

Two days later Rubens left Madrid. He crossed France rapidly, staying only one night in Paris, but finding time to visit the Luxembourg, which was now furnished, and which he declared more magnificent than anything he had seen at the court of Spain. He reached Brussels on 13th May, where he visited the Infanta and delivered her a letter from the King, in which he informed "Madam his good aunt" of the honour he had paid Rubens for his services and good parts.

Rubens remained only a few days in Brussels, hurry-
ing on to Dunkirk. The situation had grown critical and speed was most urgent, because England had signed peace with France. After the fiasco of the Île de Ré and the fall of La Rochelle, English support of the Huguenots appeared merely farcical, and it was wise for Charles, with his shortage of cash and his troubles at home, to get out of that war as best he could. It did not, however, make the peace with Spain easier to negotiate. Rubens had not learnt this tiresome news until his arrival in Brussels.

At Dunkirk he waited on an English ship, for reasons which Ross, an English envoy, explained to Carlisle's secretary, William Boswell.

"RYCHT WORSCHIPFUL AND NOBLE SIR,—Pleis Monsieur Reubines is heir at Dunquerquen and attendis for ane schip of sum force to bring him from hence to ingland for his order is not to hazerd his commission nor his messiwes except that it be in ane schip of ingland, for hie is mychtelie affrayit of the hollanderis, and except

ane schip cum to resawe him heir hie is of intentionn to retoure abak hie only dois exspect heir for ane resoluit ansueir. Withe the first fair wind the schip may cum befoir Dunquerquen or to the fort and send yeir boit aschoir and I will bring Monsieur Reubines aboard of the schip. Your honour sall resawe the incloisit and delyver the ans^r theirow to my servant oliver Ross, who will send it saiffly to my handis, exspecting to heir when the schip salbe heir that I may gif hir attendance.—Your honouris most humble and affectionat serviteur,

“HUGHE ROSS OF BALLAMOUCHEY.”

The Marquis de Ville, who had been to England on behalf of the Duc de Lorraine to urge Charles to peace with Spain, was returning at this time. It was proposed that he should go by Dunkirk, so that the ship could pick up Rubens. Charles wrote to one of his courtiers, the Earl of Holland, about it.

“HOLLAND,—This is onlie to bid you tell M^r de Ville that if he bee not content to goe in my shipp to Dunkerke although it should retarde his journey sume howers that I will complaine of him to Rosabella, for if hee goe not in my shipp Rubens journey will eather be hindered, or I shall ly open to almost a just exception to those that ar no frends to this Treatie. So going to sleepe I rest.—Your loving constant frende,

“CHARLES R.”

And he gave his orders:

“CHARLES K.—Whereas the Marquis de Ville hath bene employed hether unto us by our Cosen the

Duke of Lorrayne about affayres of speciall importance & being now to retorne back to the Duke his master & to passe through Flanders, O^r Will & Pleasure is in regard of the danger to which the seas are subject that you waft him over to Dunkerke where or at the fort of Mardyke you are to see him safely landed with his company and baggage according as you shall judge most convenient for your ship w^{ch} having performed you are then to attend the coming out of that port of such a person as the bearer hereof shall bring unto you and him to conduct into this o^r kingdome wth such servants & baggage as shall belong unto him with all convenient speede. And for so doing this shalbe yo^r warrant. Given und^r our signet at o^r mano^r of Greenwich the 20th day of May in the fifth yeare of our raigne.—To o^r trusty & welbeloved John Mince Esquire Captayne of o^r ship the *Adventure*.”

On the 3rd of June, then, Rubens crossed to Dover on the *Adventure*, captain John Mennes, and reached London two days later, where he lodged with Gerbier. He was accompanied by his brother-in-law, Hendrik Brant, secretary of Antwerp.

CHAPTER XV

POLITICS: ENGLAND

THIS was the spring in which an angry Parliament had passed the Three Resolutions and been dissolved; and in which Charles had declared: "We shall account it presumption for any to prescribe any time unto us for Parliaments, the calling and continuing of which is always in our power." Eliot was in the Tower, but the shadow of the scaffold already flickered over his prisoner. That, perhaps, Rubens was not to mark, since, in his quality of artist, he naturally saw the best of the redeless king, the only English royal patron of the arts who deserves serious recognition. He had already expressed a great desire to know Rubens.

In his first interview with Charles, which was at Greenwich the day after his arrival, Rubens learnt that the peace with France was not very solid. Charles described it as a mere suspension of hostilities, which he would at once break if he could come to an agreement with Spain. In the meantime he utterly rejected the idea of a similar suspension with Spain; it must be the whole loaf. He wanted a conference in Flanders to discuss that. Then arose the Palatinate bugbear. Charles said that he would not be satisfied with an assurance from Spain that she would use all her

influence with the Emperor for the return of that state to the Elector. Rubens replied that Spain could do no more than give such an assurance, and that it would be deceit to pretend to England that she could; and that if Charles thought she would go to war with the Emperor in that cause, he was much mistaken, since Spain very much preferred the friendship of the Emperor to that of Charles. Moreover, he reminded Charles that Spain had in her hands a treaty with France for the conquest of Great Britain.

After this interview Rubens returned to London, where he dined with Carlisle. In the afternoon he visited the Lord High Treasurer, Sir Richard Weston, and talked matters over. This Weston had been a creature of Buckingham, whom Clarendon characterised thus pointedly: "I know not by what frowardnesse in his starres, he tooke more paynes in examininge and enquiringe into other mens offices, then in the discharge of his owne, and not so much joy in what he had, as trouble and agony for what he had not. . . . He was of an imperious nature, and nothing wary in disobligeinge and provokinge other men, and had to much courage in offendinge and incensinge them, but after havinge offended and incensed them, he was of so unhappy a feminine temper that he was always in a terrible fright and apprehension of them."

Charles had instructed Rubens to confide only in this "man of bigg lookes and of meane and abjecte spirit," and therefore when, later in the day, he called on Sir Francis Cottington, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, he "spoke not a word to him of his business." However, next day the King discussed matters with Weston and the Lord Steward, Pembroke, and

it was decided that Cottington should be brought in on the negotiations. The day after that, a Friday, Sir Dudley Carleton, now Lord Dorchester and a Secretary of State, feasted Rubens, who on that occasion met Weston's eldest son and Sir Harry Vane, the diplomat. In the evening the Earl of Carlisle gave Rubens a banquet. The Lord High Treasurer paid him the same compliment on the Saturday. On Sunday there was a general meeting at Weston's house with Pembroke and Cottington. It was observed that at its conclusion the Chancellor of the Exchequer escorted Rubens to his coach.

The best of these men who vied to honour Rubens was, of course, Pembroke, the great patron of writers, "the most universally loved and esteemed of any man of that age . . . a man very well bredd, and of excellent partes, and a graceful speaker upon any subjecte, having a good proportion of learninge and a ready witt to apply it, and inlarge upon it, of a pleasant and facetious humour and a disposition affable, generous, and magnificent," with only the convivial weaknesses which were, perhaps, encouraged by his want of domestic content; anyway, the fact that he was "immoderately given up to women" appears to have resulted from his having "payed much too deare for his wife's fortune, by takinge her person into the bargayne." ¹

Yet for all this banqueting and high-honouring of the painter-diplomat, there were those who very much disliked his mission, notably Joachimi, Ambassador from the United Provinces, and Alviso Contarini, Ambassador from Venice, who described Rubens as "an ambitious and avid man who seeks above all to

¹ Clarendon.

be talked of and to obtain favour," which was the prejudiced opinion of a political opponent.

On 25th June, ten days after his arrival, Rubens had another long interview with the King, in which Charles stated that he would be content if Spain would definitely give up all the towns in the Palatinate which she garrisoned. Rubens replied that he had no power to treat of such things; but that he had with him, already signed by Philip, a pact for the suspension of hostilities. But Charles did not bite. He stood out for the whole loaf still, and now proposed a conference at Madrid, with ambassadors from the Emperor and the Duke of Bavaria empowered to treat of Palatinate affairs. Rubens agreed to report this suggestion to Philip, provided that Charles would give his royal word not to "conclude any league offensive or defensive, nor to renew any such already made with France against Spain."

Rubens afterwards discussed these proposals with Weston and Cottington, who "said that the King had gone too far, and that they feared when the affair came before the Council it would be rejected on the ground that it was obvious that, if a part of the Palatinate was accepted, it would be equivalent to a renouncement of the rest."

Thereupon Rubens returned to the King. "I did not show myself in any way satisfied," he wrote to Olivarez, "and under the pretext of my bad memory, prayed him to repeat and confirm what he had said to me in the morning, which he did very distinctly; and the two lords above mentioned (Weston and Cottington), having been received in audience, he asserted and confirmed it afresh. I do not report these things in such detail because I believe that I have succeeded

in anything that can give satisfaction to Your Excellency, but because I very much fear the instability of English humours. Truly these people rarely persist in a resolution, but on the contrary they change every minute, and always from bad to worse."

These strictures, though largely true of Charles's diplomatic methods, sound a little harsh from the pen of one who acted for Philip IV. Perhaps the master of five languages was afflicted again with his bad memory. However, after two months of dealing with Charles, he was able to write: "The King appears to me truly scrupulous to keep his promise," and indeed Charles's attitude over the particular affair was, on the whole, worthy and consistent.

Rubens wished, after this, to return to Brussels and report to the Infanta, but Cottington detained him because his absence, he said, would seriously hinder and perhaps even put a stop to the negotiations.

Rubens reported all this to Olivarez, concluding with a pessimistic view of his mission. "I am left with no hope of success." What worried him most was the prospective arrival of Châteauneuf, the French ambassador. In a further report to Olivarez, he thus described the situation:

"There are several parties in this court: one, which is led by the Earl of Carlisle, wishes peace with Spain and war with France; the second, which is much larger, wishes peace with everybody: to tell the truth, I believe the Grand Treasurer is of this opinion and also Lord Holland. The third is the worst: this party wishes a war with Spain and an offensive league with France against her; it is much strengthened by the arrival of the French ambassador, and it works

mightily through the Venetian ambassador, a bad influence at this court."

Time dragged on; the proposals remained the same, but no action was taken, although Rubens never ceased to press Charles to nominate an ambassador to Spain. But at last, on 6th of July, he was instructed to report to Olivarez that Charles had appointed Cottington to that post. Cottington himself could not write because he was very busy, nor could the Grand Treasurer because he was much troubled with the stone. "There is no lack of goodwill," Rubens assured Olivarez, an assurance which seemed necessary to cover the casualness of the English. Cottington was to start on 1st August, if in the meantime Spain had similarly appointed an ambassador.

Châteauneuf was by this time in England. "He was received with very little eagerness," Rubens reported, "and the welcome was so cold that the greater part of the carriages which went to meet him were empty, although there were only about twenty of them. . . . Above all things, we must learn of what the French ambassador comes to treat with the King. I will give you continual advice of this, since I do not lack means of learning it."

In a confidential letter to the Infanta, written exactly a month later, that is, five days after Cottington had been due to sail, Philip announced his appointment of Carlos Coloma as ambassador to England, but ordered that he was not to sail until there was definite news of Cottington's embarkation.

Meanwhile Weston had found himself sufficiently recovered from the stone to write a polite note to Olivarez, in which he referred to the trouble Rubens

had taken, "and how he has won esteem, not only by his beautiful gift but also by his great cleverness." Cottington, too, had found time to write and space to praise the painter. "I will only say that his having been sent here has been much approved, because he is not only very clever and adroit in treating of affairs but also because he has known how to win the esteem of everybody, but especially of the King my master."

When forwarding these formal notes to Olivarez, Rubens also reported on the activities of the French ambassador, who was attempting to form a league between England and France to recover the Palatinate and deliver Germany from the ascendancy of the House of Austria. To conciliate the people he was urging Charles to call a Parliament. "But many consider it an odious and impertinent thing that the minister of an enemy sovereign only newly reconciled should so soon intervene in the internal and domestic affairs of the kingdom," Rubens wrote; and he concluded his letter with an illuminating account of the Court of Charles I:

"The greatest lords lead a sumptuous life and spend enormously, so that most of them are heavily in debt. Among the first of these are the Earl of Carlisle and the Earl of Holland, who hold their followers together and their position among the nobility by their table, luxury and generosity being highly esteemed in this court. I cannot speak of all the other lords and ministers, who, for the most part, have insufficient revenues to support their rank, and are obliged to fulfil their needs as best they can, and that is why both private and public interests are sold

here for cash down. And I firmly believe that the Cardinal de Richelieu is very liberal in gaining partisans by this means."

By the 22nd July Rubens was growing restless. He begged leave of Olivarez to return home. Always so eager to take up public service, the Master as often grew weary of courts, as often soon suffered a fierce nostalgia for his Flemish palace, his learned friends, his own spacious studio. Moreover, Rubens's pride was hurt by a letter of disapproval from Olivarez. Neither that foolish statesman nor the other little grandes of Spain really desired peace: they wished to hold everything in abeyance until they had made up their wobbly minds between England and France. Rubens's genuine desire for peace and his diplomatic action disturbed their vacillating minds. Rubens answered their remonstrance firmly and truthfully, and asserted that he had not in any way exceeded his powers or instructions. The point was that the Spanish court never expected its envoys to act up to their powers and instructions, or ever to act definitely at all. Rubens was anxious for speed, because he knew how furiously Cardinal de Richelieu was working against him. One ruse of that eminent Churchman's had been to send a private letter by an Englishman named Furston to the Lord Treasurer stating that Spain only wished to make peace with England to betray her, that France had much more influence over the Duke of Bavaria, that the Palatinate affair could only be settled by the Duke of Bavaria, and a good deal more to the like purpose, concluding with a mighty handsome offer of cash to the Lord Treasurer. Weston, however, had the honesty and good sense to

show the letter to Charles, who merely laughed, and told Rubens about it, though in the strictest confidence. With some difficulty Rubens won permission to relate the affair to Olivarez.

The position was so shaky and the delays were so exasperating that Rubens felt himself compelled to bother Charles for a written statement of the proposals he had made to him at Greenwich. He obtained this only with considerable difficulty. Yet the Spanish Junta, when it met on 24th July, recommended that Rubens should neither facilitate nor hinder the despatch of an ambassador from England. In other words, he was to do nothing in the business which he had been sent out to do. The Marquis de Leganes, the false Messiah, proposed that the matter should be placed in the hands of someone of higher rank than Rubens, and therefore, presumably, more capable of doing nothing. That, of course, was not exactly how he expressed himself. "The negotiations must be continued," he said, "without our committing ourselves more than is absolutely necessary." Only a grandee could be entrusted with such a difficult task of letting things slide.

In the meantime Rubens grew daily more sick of it all, and a letter of his to Dupuy, written early in August, is tainted with the bitterness of disillusion.

"If in my youth I had visited in so short a time so many different countries and courts, it would have been very much more valuable to me than it is now, when I am old. My body would have been more fitted to bear the inconveniences of post-travel, and my mind, by the experience and knowledge of such diverse people, would have been made capable of

grander things in the future. Instead, my body uses up all the strength which is left to me, and I shall not have time to enjoy the fruits of so many labours. All I shall have won is to die knowing more.

“However, I console myself by thinking with joy on all the beautiful things I have met with on my journeys. This island, for example, seems to me worthy the consideration of a man of taste, not only because of the charm of the countryside and the beauty of the people, not only because of the outward show, which appears to me most choice and to announce a people rich and happy in the bosom of peace, but also by the incredible quantity of excellent pictures, statues, and ancient inscriptions which are in this court.”

He then went on to speak of the Arundel marbles and of Selden, and he enclosed a letter to be forwarded to Peiresc, the first he had written to him for a year. The scholar and the artist in Peter-Paul were kicking against the tiresome bonds of official correspondence. He wanted to be back in Antwerp . . . “to breathe in my house” . . . and carrying on the old correspondence about marbles and engraved gems and Roman inscriptions, the things that his heart loved better than courts and princes and political chicanery.

On 18th August he went to Oatlands, the royal palace near Chertsey, to announce to the King the appointment of Don Carlos as ambassador. The King was delighted, but regretted that Cottington could not now start until the end of the month or early in September. Cottington confirmed this irritating delay that night during a fête at his palace. He drew Rubens aside from the sumptuous gaiety, and discussed the

proposed voyage at great length. Even after that Rubens could not be at peace to enjoy the "unimaginable luxury." Weston cornered him and tried, without success, to pump him on affairs in general.

But even now there was vacillation. The Junta wanted Sir Walter Haston, the previous ambassador, in place of Cottington, because Olivarez already knew how to handle him. They ordered Rubens to contrive this, if he could find means. They now approved of Rubens, and rendered him a vote of thanks for what he had done and reported, and for the tact which he had shown in the business; and they instructed him to remain in England until Don Carlos had arrived. Don Carlos must have begun to take on, for Rubens, something of the character of that Messiah for whom he had so long waited in the Low Countries. Another charming resolution was passed at the same sitting.

"Presuming that it is well known that everything is for sale in England, Don Carlos Coloma must carry ample funds with him when he goes there, and be charged to gain partisans and so facilitate the negotiations. The Junta is persuaded that one only gains what one buys."

By 2nd September Rubens and all other friends of peace with Spain were in despair; they regarded the negotiations as practically broken off. The Duke of Savoy had long ago given up and allied himself with France. He had now grown definitely anti-Spanish. Rubens could, therefore, no longer be so friendly with Barozzi, his agent in London, at whose house he had daily heard mass. No official word had come from

Spain as to whether the proposals were likely to be satisfactory or not. It was already decided that the ship which was to carry Cottington to Spain should wait for him, so short was the interview expected to be and so certain was everyone of its unsuccessful outcome. Moreover, the French ambassador, having offered Charles any terms—*carte blanche*—for an offensive or defensive alliance against Spain, had announced his intention of leaving that offer open until Cottington's return, and of himself remaining in England until then. Spain, as usual, was playing into Richelieu's hands by doing nothing. Charles alone kept hope alive, a hope born of his hate and distrust of the French cardinal. Rubens, in one of his earliest despatches, had reported: "The King of England himself said to me that if peace were made with France it would be our fault . . . that he detested the French, and would never trust them, because they had deceived him in all past treaties, and always broken their sworn faith." In another despatch he reported that the King had said: "He knew well the tricks and disloyalties of the Cardinal de Richelieu."

By now Charles was ready to declare that all he wanted was "a semblance of satisfaction to support his *amour propre*, and that truly those places in the Palatinate meant very little to him." Charles was being "very scrupulous to keep his promise" to Spain, the national enemy of his country, but less faithful, perhaps, to his brother-in-law, to whom he was bound by every tie of fealty, blood, and religion. Moreover, he was growing cold in the cause of Holland. In fact, he was prepared to throw over all his old allies if he could win a new alliance with Spain. He saw in her the pattern of what he would have England; he saw

the semblance of her power and her King's ancient authority; he ignored, as he ignored in England, the seething forces of modern discontent that were to save England, but in Spain were only to smoulder into the empty ashes of a burnt-out empire.

Rubens, growing tired in the hopeless struggle against trickery, inefficiency, and systematic procrastination, admitted bitterness into his mind, where it made war on his customary robust optimism. In a letter to Gevartius, to sympathise with him on the loss of his wife, he wrote this strange sentence: "I will only add this poor kind of consolation, that we are in an age when life is only possible if we unload everything that weighs us down, as the sailor does in the tempest when he makes ready to swim." It was strange consolation, indeed, for the loss of a wife, but Rubens must have been thinking rather of his own heavy load, the public business which was bending even his broad shoulders; must have been wishing that he could travel lighted of kings and their ministers. And then he went on to speak of the fall of Wesel, which the Dutch had taken suddenly on 19th August.

"I do not know what to say of public affairs, except to impute to Destiny (not to accuse the Gods or men) the loss of Wesel and all that will come of it. The Dutch have now cause to think themselves the chosen people, and to say to God: *Nos autem populus tuus et oves pascuæ tuæ*. For it seems that this is a stroke of divine providence, which, truly, comes to the aid of inexperience whenever a misfortune befalls a good cause."

An odd sentiment, that Divine Providence should

support the enemies of a good cause, a sentiment which could only have been wrung from such an optimist as Rubens when he saw his own cause, which he believed to be good, so set upon and stupidly spoiled. His great mind, accustomed to triumph and clear thinking, was fogged with disappointment.

At last, on 19th September, he was able to announce to Charles that Olivarez had officially acknowledged receipt of the proposals, and that nothing now stood in the way of progress. Charles promised that Cottington should be despatched in a few days. Rubens's natural optimism reasserted itself. He began to profess that the delay had even been advantageous, because it had allowed time for the machinations of the French ambassador to be countered.

The Junta met on 30th October, and resolved that a house should be prepared for Cottington. On the same day Philip ordered Olivarez to write to Rubens thanking him once more for his "zeal, solicitude, and attention." It really looked as if something was going to happen. Indeed, on 3rd November Cottington set sail for Spain, and Rubens and the Spanish party waited patiently for the arrival of Don Carlos Coloma in England. Then, on 24th November, the Lord Treasurer came in a high fury to Rubens with a credible report that Don Carlos had received no orders to sail. The whole affair was off, cried Weston; the French were right to call the Spanish perfidious and to say that they mocked the King of England; that they had never meant to send an ambassador. He was going to despatch a courier forthwith to recall Cottington. Rubens reported all this justified outburst to the Infanta, and added his own opinion with a simplicity that does not hide his profound disgust.

"I hold the delay in the present situation so bad that I curse the hour in which I came to this kingdom."

However, on the very day on which the Infanta received Rubens's letter, Don Carlos also received his orders. She sent a special courier with the news to Rubens, who at once carried it to the King. But Charles would not be easily mollified, and he wrote express to "his right trustie and well-beloved" Cottington cancelling his recall, but ordering him that on his arrival in Madrid he should not ask audience of the King, but "send to him or Olivares (as you shall think fitt) a message to this porpose. That ye wer sent thither by us full fraughted with Powers & Instructions to beginn & if need wer to end a Treatie of Peace betwine the two Crounes & for the establishing of peace in Christendom, but that it was ever understood by us & promised by them, as well for point of honnor as convenience for treating theas greate affaires, that a reciprocall Ambassage should come from them to answer yours, of which we fynding a delay, have commanded you nether to demand audience nor to beginn anie treatie, though it bee offered by them, till wee have sent you word of our satisfaction in this Point. This is what ye ar to delyver to them at your first coming & punctually observe till further commands: but though we have stoped both your mouth & eares as a Publique Minister, yet we expect of your industrie, by communications with dyvers as a Privat Parson, both what is the caus of this delay on there syde of sending an Ambassador, and what may bee hoped of ther good intentions to give us satisfaction."

Poor Rubens was down again. He wrote to Olivarez that he was preparing to return home, where his affairs

were in a ruinous state because of his eighteen months' absence: and he begged some excuse if his mission failed, in consideration of his having arrived at a most unfortunate moment, when the peace between England and France had been recently signed and the French ambassador was due, who had since come and worked so steadily against him.

By 15th December things had taken a better turn. Charles was satisfied by Rubens that Don Carlos really was coming, and he sent a further express messenger to Cottington to cancel his previous despatch. Cottington arrived in Madrid early in January, and Don Carlos in England about the same time after all. He was magnificently received by the King and Queen in the banqueting-hall at Whitehall Palace, where there was such an assembly of fine ladies that they stretched from the dais to the door, although many had fallen out of line for fear of having their ruffs spoilt in the press. Whatever the conclusion might be, Rubens had succeeded, against so many difficulties and through so many fluctuations of hope and despair, in bringing the crowns of England and Spain to treat with all solemnity of the peace he longed for.

On 3rd March Charles knighted him at Whitehall, and presented him with the jewelled sword with which he had given the accolade, a diamond ring, and a diamond hatband, which he had bought from Gerbier for five hundred pounds. When he paid for these he also paid Gerbier one hundred and twenty-eight pounds two shillings and elevenpence for the entertainment of Rubens, Hendrik Brant, and their suite.

This knighthood was not the only official honour Rubens received in England. Early in October he had visited Cambridge, where the Senate had enter-

tained him sumptuously and conferred on him the honorary degree of Master of Arts.

There followed on the arrival of Don Carlos certain magnificent entertainments for him and Rubens, notably two feasts given by the Earl of Carlisle.

On the afternoon of 6th, Rubens went to Chelsea to take leave of the Dutch ambassador; he expressed the hope that Holland would continue to treat for peace with Spain, even if the peace between England and Spain fell through. The next day he left for Dover, where, however, he was delayed for some time. A party of young English boys and girls were anxious to sail under his protection, the boys designing to enter the Jesuit school at Douai, the girls into various convents. The English authorities held up the ship until proper licence had been obtained for their departure, since by English law only merchants could leave the country except under special licence.

Sir Peter-Paul finally sailed home on 23rd March, some ten months after his arrival in England, having "woune the reputation here amongst us of two honest a man to speake untruths contrary to his owne knowledge," ¹ a rare reputation for a representative of Spain.

¹ Lord Dorchester.

CHAPTER XVI

HELENA FOURMENT

SOON after his return to Antwerp Rubens opened up his old style of correspondence with Peiresc. His first letter was a lengthy dissertation on Roman tripods, to which he added a number of quotations from Isidorus, Julius Pollux, Pausanius, and Surlius bearing on the matter, collected by his son Albert, who "occupies himself seriously with archæology and advances excellently in Greek." The letter concluded with a reference to the sack of Mantua by the Imperial troops. "I am profoundly grieved," he wrote, "for I served for many years the House of Gonzaga, and enjoyed in my youth a most pleasant sojourn in that country. *Sic erat in fatis.*"

He was hardly slower in reopening correspondence with Pierre Dupuy; and in the first letter took his last leave of an old friend. "I can say nothing of the death of Monsieur le Marquis de Spinola, but that it was caused by work and troubles, *vires ultra sortemque senectæ*. It seems as if he were weary of life. I have seen a letter of his written when he was still in health, where he says: 'I hope that God will do me the grace of calling me to Him at the end of this month of September, or before.' He was deeply hurt by the bad offices they did him in Spain. . . . I have lost in him one of the greatest friends and

patrons I had in the world, as a hundred of his letters will witness."

Spanish ingratitude and trickery had worn out Spain's greatest servant, and Rubens may well have reflected that it was lucky for him that he was safely back at his painting and his antiquarian studies, among the simple, learned men of Antwerp, his friends, men whom the haughty grandes of Spain would have despised, but men who would have known how to honour a Spinola as they knew how to honour a Rubens.

He must have felt strangely peaceful, now that it was no longer his tiresome business to play the diplomat, and, moreover, he must have been deeply gratified to learn in September that peace had been concluded between England and Spain on the terms which he had so laboriously contrived for. It was not actually signed until 15th November 1630, nor proclaimed until a month later.

Rubens now set to work on the Henri IV series, which Maria de' Medici had ordered for the Luxembourg at the same time as the series already completed. There had been some difficulty and confusion about this commission. Far back in February 1626, Richelieu had tried to persuade the Queen-Mother to replace Rubens with Joseppin. There had also been talk of Guido Reni being employed, and Maria had approached Cardinal Spada in the matter. His Eminence had replied that Joseppin was too old and Reni too busy; he had suggested Guerchino. However, nothing more was heard of the business and Rubens remained the prospective painter. Two years later, he had begun work on the designs and sketches. There was no hurry then, as the gallery was not ready to receive

the pictures. Now, in 1630, he heard that the measurements were changed, owing to the insertion of doors. He wrote to the Abbé de St Ambroise praying him not to cut off the head of the King seated in his triumphal chariot, but to give him grace of half a foot.

So Rubens took up his old course of life. But one thing was missing, so necessary to this essential man—the dear companionship of a woman. The pain of Isabella's loss had been quietened to a gentle memory, strictly in accord with his belief that man should not be ridden by the past. He now sought out and found a new wife. He married her on 6th December 1630 at St Jacques's. He was fifty-three, but robust and famous and infinitely charming, not a bad match for Helena Fourment, although she was only sixteen.

Helena was the eleventh daughter of Daniel Fourment, a worthy silk merchant of Antwerp, and already connected by marriage to Rubens. Her brother Daniel had married Clara Brant, Rubens's sister-in-law. It was at the feet of this girl, a richly opulent beauty, flowing with the primitive vigour of womanhood, that the great Master laid his intense devotion. He worshipped her, almost pathetically. She obsessed his work from that day on: as herself, as Pagan goddesses, as Christian virgins, she crowded his canvases. His passionate and tender heart found in her a last ideal to love, a last glory to enthrone. And yet, years later, when he excused himself to Peiresc, he wrote as if he had chosen her in the way of business, as it were. No doubt he felt that he must excuse a human passion so unbecoming the grave aloofness of a Renaissance pedant. For all his true love of learning and orderli-

ness, there were times when he must have felt them irksome burdens on his natural Rabelaisian virility.

“Being unable to make up my mind to live in celibacy,” he wrote, “I took the step of marrying again, for, while placing continence above everything, it is permitted us to give our senses legitimate satisfaction, thanking God for the pleasure he grants us. I have, therefore, married a young woman of honourable, though middle-class birth, although everyone advised me to choose a lady about the court. But I was chiefly afraid of finding my companion subject to pride, that plague of the nobility. That was my reason for choosing one who would not blush to see me take up my brush. And, to tell the truth, I loved my liberty too much to exchange it for the embraces of an old woman.”

Gevartius wrote the new epithalamium: *nobilis clarissimique viri D. Petri-Pauli Rubenii, equitis, Regiæ Majestati in Sanctiore Concilio a Secretis, etc., Sæculi sui Apellis, secundum se Sponsi: et Lectissimæ Virginis D. Helenæ Formentiæ moribus et venustate incomparabilis.*

When Zeuxis, Gevartius began, prepared to paint Helena he chose five virgins, and composed his heroine from their various beauties, which Gevartius then most learnedly and succinctly described. “But greater than Zeuxis,” he cried, “is Rubens, of whom one knoweth not whether to say he excelleth in his eloquence or in his art; behold he possesseth the living image of the Helena of Antwerp, who far surpasseth the Helena of Greece.” And once more the kindly old man embarked on a delightful catalogue of female charms, not

forgetting to compare Helena with Venus and Thetis. "The beauty of her body," he continued confidently, "is surpassed by the charm of her manner, by her gracious simplicity, by her chaste reserve. She will be faithful to the man of her choice, whom she will love with a peaceful love. Theseus and Paris will sharpen their arms against her in vain. Be ready then for new battles of love, O Apelles of our century; thine art can make no further progress; nought can surpass the beauty of the forms thou createst; already the chaste and living face of thine Helen smiles upon thee.

"And thou, O Virgin, be happy of a husband whose illustrious name is sung by renown, whose colours animate the entire universe, who, by the beauty of his works, surpasseth nature, and before whom Praxiteles, Parrhasius, Titian, and Quentin Matsys bow down. Who will name the temples and royal palaces which his hands have ennobled? The Tagus, the Tiber, the Danube, and the Arno venerate him, but the Scheldt can rejoice in the glory of owning him. The Seine admireth the wonders of his art and is astonished before the History of the Queen. Shall I speak of his studies in Roman manners and Greek art, and of his knowledge of ancient history? And even his glory as a painter is little beside his wisdom and his talents as counsellor of a King. Already the Thames hath been amazed to hear him speak in the name of his sovereign and to see him conquer the boughs of green olive. May he who has passed twice ten lustres, grow green again in thy young blossoming; in thine arms, young bride, he will grow young again, and he will win a new strength from thy charms, as the lovely Hebe saved her husband Hercules from the weary consequences of age."

The worthy gentleman must have been mightily delighted with his composition, and no doubt Peter-Paul praised it with proper gravity. But poor Helena may have thought it a terrible thing for her untried sixteen years to be linked up to a man who had astonished the Seine and amazed the Thames. Luckily for her, Peter-Paul was not quite so godlike as the dear Antwerp savants would have had him be. There was a twinkle still in his eye, and a jaunty curl to his moustache, and altogether he was no such solemn a cavalier.

A little after Helena had recovered from this awesome epithalamium, her husband handed her another portentous document, couched, too, in the Latin tongue. Therein she read how Charles, by the Grace of God, King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, etc., saluted all Kings, Princes, Dukes, Marquises, Counts, Barons, Grandees, Lords, and Nobles; and how Charles the King found nothing nearer his heart than the worthy recompensing of virtue; how that he knew he had been raised to so high a dignity by Divine Grace so that the virtuous might know that they possessed, after God, a public remunerator of human merits; and how that he had chosen from among these virtuous, Peter-Paul Rubens. "He is most particularly dear to us," she read, "not only because of his affection for us and our subjects, but even more because he has rendered himself worthy in the eyes of our court by his great fidelity to the King his master, by the wisdom and practical knowledge which so eminently enhance the nobility of his mind and the glory of his race; when, moreover, we consider the integrity and intelligence that he showed when employed on the peace recently concluded

between us and the King his master, we have, in remembrance of the good qualities of which he has given proof and of our special affection, added to the nobility of the family of the said Peter-Paul Rubens the dignity of Knight of the Golden Spur . . . and we have, after mature consideration, with all knowledge and out of the fullness of our royal power, added to the blazon of the said Peter-Paul Rubens a quartering taken from our royal blazon—namely, a canton gules with the lion or.”

And there was more of it. But of course it really told her no more than she already knew. Sir Peter-Paul cannot have failed to describe to her the accolade at Whitehall, and the little bearded man who was the public remunerator after God.

There was a third most solemn document to come, in a little over a year, this time from Philip, by the Grace of God, whose multitudinous titles her husband had met before. By it, after many fulsome commendations of his character, he elevated Rubens to the rank of Chevalier.

But in the meantime Rubens had barely escaped a new political burden. Six days after Charles had signed his patent of knighthood, the Spanish Junta had met to discuss the appointment of a permanent ambassador to England, and, as an ambassador could not be expected to be ready for immediate departure, a temporary resident to herald him. The King had given the Council their choice between three men for resident; one of them was Rubens. They chose another, Juan de Neocolalde. Count Ñate voted that he found the qualities of Rubens much to be recommended, particularly because he had already great knowledge of the English court and was in relation-

ship with it, but that, as he was a craftsman who worked with his hands for money, it seemed to him that His Majesty could hardly employ him as a minister. Ònate had not thought of that when somebody had had to be found to negotiate a difficult peace; it only occurred to him when an honorary post was under consideration. He had been one of the masters of Spinola.

Philip ordered the Infanta to despatch de Necolalde, who was then at Brussels, but as she required his services she sent one Henry Turner, an Englishman who had lived many years in her capital. Philip wrote to her expressing his displeasure, and ordering her to send Rubens at once, since Necolalde could not go. He had apparently overcome Ònate's scruples. "Rubens is well esteemed in the English court," he wrote, "and most fit to handle any kind of affair because of the prudence he brings to negotiation. . . . When he is there he will be informed of what to do. On such occasions one needs ministers who have given proofs of intelligence and with whom one has had reason to be satisfied."

However, the Infanta's reply was that she had sent Necolalde after all, and not Rubens, because she did not find him willing to accept the mission, even although it might last only a few days. Rubens knew too well what a few days meant in Spanish politics, and after all he had married a wife.

However, he was not yet done with political cares; but the scene of his next short act was near home.

CHAPTER XVII

POLITICS: MARIA DE' MEDICI

MARIA DE' MEDICI had been up to her old tricks again. The wily priest, Monsieur l'Abbé de Luçon, who had reconciled her to her son the King, now swollen mighty big and red-hatted as Cardinal de Richelieu, was no longer her quiet favourite. "Cardinal de Richelieu," Rubens wrote to Olivarez, "forgetting that he is her creature, and that she not only raised him from the mud but also gave him that high place he now occupies, launches against her the thunders of his ingratitude." Petty quarrels between them developed into a violent rupture at the end of 1630. Maria was imprisoned at Compiègne, and Rubens found himself glad of the long discussion with the Abbé de St Ambroise, which had delayed his proceeding with the Henri IV series. "It truly seems as if a good genius prevented me from embarking on that enterprise," he wrote to Dupuy. "I regard what I have done as lost work; for it is to be feared that so eminent a person is not arrested to be easily released. . . . All courts are subject to the vagaries of fortune, but none so much as the French court. But since it is difficult to judge wisely of events which are seen from afar, I will say no more for fear of criticising unfairly."

Gaston D'Orléans, the King's brother, made common cause with Maria against him and his minister. He

went off to Orléans. Louis XIII chased him with troops through Burgundy and Franche Conté to Lorraine. Charles IV, Duc de Lorraine, raised troops to support him, and the Infanta sent him financial aid. She reported her action to Philip, who approved, but asked her to go no further. Her rôle was to be that of mediator between Maria and her son. When, therefore, Achille D'Étampes, Commandeur de Valençay, agent of the Ducs de Lorraine and D'Orléans, "a man, it appeared, of good judgment, resolute character, and strong attachment to the Queen-Mother,"¹ presented himself in Flanders, it was necessary that he should be coldly, but tactfully, handled. The Infanta charged the new Spanish ambassador, the Marquis D'Aytona, with that task, but he was gone to Dunkirk. She transferred the charge to Rubens, who at once hurried off to consult D'Aytona. After his return he received de Valençay at Antwerp. De Valençay's proposal was that the Spanish fleet at Dunkirk should attack the coast of France while an army attacked from the east. Isabella ordered Rubens to temporise; and therefore de Valençay was told that his powers were insufficient and was sent back to Nancy to remedy that. Rubens again visited D'Aytona at Dunkirk to talk over the matter.

The Duc de Lorraine was anxious that Maria should fly to the court of Brussels. She, however, feared that to throw herself entirely on Spanish support would alienate her own French supporters, and she decided to go, for the present, to La Capelle, a frontier town which was governed by one of her most ardent friends, the Marquis de Vardes. She escaped during the night of 18th July, but two leagues from La Capelle she was

¹ D'Aytona.

met by de Vardes, who told her that the old governor, his father, who disapproved of the plan, had entered the town, made himself known to the garrison, and closed the gates. The Queen-Mother of France had no choice but to cross the frontier. The first night she passed in a hamlet, and next day, having learnt that she would be received there, she entered Avesnes in Hainault. From there she sent to her son, the King, a messenger to inform him that she had left the kingdom. The messenger, who met the King coming out of Paris, complained bitterly of the old governor of La Capelle for not admitting the Queen-Mother, "which was a sort of treason, because he had thus obliged her to quit the kingdom." Louis carried this odd piece of sophistry to Richelieu and answered at his dictation. A peasant who had guided Maria went to Paris to ask the King for a tip. The King thanked him, gave him six doubloons, and told him that next day the Cardinal would have him arrested. The Queen-Mother's baggage was allowed to follow, but not her treasure. These were the opening gambits of civil war in the seventeenth century.

The position was most delicate. When previously the Duc de Lorraine had consulted the Infanta about receiving Maria, the Infanta had been much perplexed. She had advised with D'Aytona and the Cardinal de la Cueva, who all agreed that there was no time to consult Madrid before sending some sort of answer. They had therefore replied that if the affairs of the Queen-Mother could bear delay, it would be agreeable to the Infanta to have time for reference to Philip. Not, they had hastened to add, because they hesitated to receive her, but that she might be able to take action to preserve her estates from Richelieu during her

absence. If, however, she were pressed, the Infanta "would not fail to do for her what was due to her royal person." Now, therefore, it was up to the Infanta to do that, whatever exactly it might mean.

D'Aytona was sent to Avesnes to offer Maria a thousand compliments from the Infanta, and to find out what was her pleasure. "She answered laughing," D'Aytona reported to Philip, "that since she found herself in Your Majesty's hands, her pleasure was to do what Your Majesty wished."

She appointed the Marquis de Vieuville to act for her, and accepted Rubens, whom D'Aytona had taken with him, as intermediary. D'Aytona gathered that Maria wanted two hundred thousand scudi and permission, even assistance, to levy troops and possibly ships.

Eight days later Maria removed to Mons on D'Aytona's suggestion, in order that she might be farther from the frontier. Every day, servants and gentlemen of quality joined her; and it was said that the Cardinal was so anxious to avoid trouble that he offered her the government of a province in France, and offered the Duc D'Orléans an army of thirty thousand men, whose wages would be paid if he would employ himself and them out of the kingdom.

This being the situation, D'Aytona advised Philip to the point. "Neither Your Majesty," he wrote, "nor any of your royal predecessors have ever had so propitious an opportunity to humble your greatest enemies, those who most weigh against your grandeur; because it has never been known that Your Majesty should have at your disposal a Queen who for so long governed France . . . and the King's brother and heir-presumptive to the throne."

Rubens, of course, was entirely for Maria. He had never liked Richelieu, had been his diplomatic enemy during the recent mission in England, and, after all, owed Maria gratitude for the grandest of his commissions.

"Surely this is a most clear example," he wrote to Olivarez, "of the evil that may be done by a favourite who is moved more by personal ambition than by the public weal and the service of his king, even to such a point that a good prince, badly advised, can allow himself to violate the obligations of nature towards his mother and his blood." Realising that this was not a very tactful sentiment to express to so notorious a favourite as Olivarez, Rubens added a few polite sentences to reassure His Excellency that he, who cared only for "the true glory and grandeur of the King his master," did not come under the category of Richelieu at all.

Therefore Rubens advised Olivarez to aid Maria in every way except war. "I have never urged war," he truthfully proclaims, "but have always tried, so far as I have been able, to procure peace everywhere; and if I see that the Queen-Mother and Monsieur (D'Orléans) seek to create a rupture between the two crowns, I will have nothing further to do with the business. But since they assure me that they have no such aim, I have no fear, particularly as their reasons are very clear." They did not want to throw themselves entirely on Spanish support, for the reason which Maria had adduced as an objection to her leaving France. Moreover, their French supporters were numerous; partly because of the general hate of the Cardinal; partly because the King was ill, and many turned towards the rising sun, his brother; partly because Maria had made many friends by her favours.

But money was essential if those supporters were to be employed to good purpose, and Rubens, like D'Aytona, pleaded for an immediate grant. He, too, saw the immense political opportunity the situation offered for Spain. The sum asked for was three hundred thousand golden ecus of twelve reals to the ecu, less, Rubens pointed out, than the cost of the upkeep of the army in the Low Countries for two months. "I pray Your Excellency," he urged, "to free generous Spain from that false opprobrium in which she is held by obstinate opinion, as a nation that cannot promptly grasp opportunities that present themselves, but that after infinite deliberations sends help too late, *post bellum auxilium*, which cannot be reconciled with that speed which is Your Excellency's most notable virtue."

Never before, perhaps, even in those early Gonzaga days, had Rubens allowed himself such cruel irony. He knew very well, of course, that Olivarez would not see through the veil of diplomatic flattery, and knowing equally well how often Spain sent *post bellum auxilium*, if she ever made up her mind to do anything at all, he sugared his advice by this diplomatic, if perhaps rather regrettable, attribution to Olivarez of the very virtue he least possessed.

However, neither the King nor the Junta, when it met in full force for a long sitting, approved of Rubens's advice. "When one employs these people in a negotiation," Olivarez said of Rubens, "they go on like blind men, and think only of producing a farago of Italian verbosity." Such censure from the man who ruined the Spanish empire was as true a compliment to the Master as Ōnate's disapproval of him because he worked with his hands.

The reasons for which Spain refused to help Maria, in spite of the advice of Rubens and every other minister on the spot, were set out at length by Philip in a letter to the Infanta. First, he doubted the estimated number of French supporters, because "the French are easily elated and speak on slight foundations." Or even if there were such a number, he held the French to be so changeable that the number might be immediately reduced when they were called upon to act. Secondly, Louis had his veterans and already held the fortresses of France. Thirdly, to aid Maria would probably lead to open war between Spain and France. But, he concluded, if Maria's party first proved its strength by military successes, then he might come to its aid, in other words, send *post bellum auxilium*.

The Junta met again on 11th September, when Olivarez expressed himself somewhat differently about Rubens.

"The despatch which Rubens sends in the name of the Queen-Mother," he said, "contains a number of excellent proposals, most seductive and plausible, but difficult to put into effect by treaties." He continued at considerable length to point out the risks of any action, and counselled the usual policy of waiting on events. Those who followed him spoke much to the same purpose, while admitting that "attention must be paid to Rubens's advice; since he had shown such ability in sifting and reporting all the facts that bore on the case." The King's decree which resulted from all these lengthy speeches was that the Infanta should be instructed not to commit herself to anything. Philip wrote to Maria, who had now removed to Brussels, and his letter was a masterpiece of evasion.

He complimented her on her happy arrival in his states and on her good health, and expressed the hope that God would arrange everything satisfactorily.

Matters were, by this time, somewhat complicated by dissensions between Maria and D'Orléans, stirred up, according to Rubens, by an Oratorian father, who had won a great ascendancy over the Queen-Mother. He was reported to be in the pay of the Duc de Lorraine, who was anxious to marry his sister to D'Orléans, and prepared to conciliate everybody, even the Cardinal, for that purpose. In the meantime Maria had come to Antwerp in the company of the Infanta, where they lodged in the Abbey of St Michael, that abbey where the body of Maria Pypelinckx had now lain for over twenty years; and Maria the Queen did herself the honour of visiting Peter-Paul. "Her Majesty enjoyed extreme contentment in contemplating the animated marvels of his pictures," wrote the courtier La Serre, "the colours of which, no doubt, must have been mixed by Admiration herself, since none is ever weary of admiring their beauty and perfection."

Alas for Rubens that the Queen-Mother was no longer in the position to buy his animated marvels; on the contrary, she was compelled to pawn her jewels, and Rubens was one of her brokers, a strange sequel to his early relationship with her.

The confusion worse confounded at last determined the Infanta to listen to no further proposals either from Maria or D'Orléans. She heartily wished them back in France or anywhere outside the Low Countries. Even Rubens grew weary of Maria's bad management and capriciousness, and was glad to undertake a more congenial task than that of intermediary between a

factionous exile and a do-nothing court. He begged to be released from his engagement in the affairs of Maria, and his prayer was granted. In the May of the following year he was troubled by a visit from a gentleman of the Duc de Bouillon, a partisan of D'Orléans, who required protection from the Infanta. Rubens passed on his application and dropped the matter.

It is not necessary to follow the fortunes of Maria after Rubens had severed his connection with her. It is enough to say that, after an abortive war, to which Philip did at last and after all give aid, as Rubens had so long ago advised, D'Orléans submitted to his brother, but again quarrelled with him. Maria and her son remained for some years in the Low Countries, troubling the peace and costing much. At length they quarrelled between themselves. Maria wandered lonely over Europe, staying in England and in Holland for a time, everywhere an unwanted guest, poor and neglected and very little pitied. And so she died in Cologne. That was the end of the splendour of the fat banker's daughter from Florence, and the best thing in her life had been her commission of the Medici Gallery. The only part in greatness which she can claim is the reflected glory of the Master who served her well.

CHAPTER XVIII

POLITICS: EPILOGUE

RUBENS'S new undertaking was profoundly secret, its particulars being known only to a few of the most highly placed ministers. Gerbier, however, who was now the political agent of Charles I in Brussels, managed to worm out some information.

"S^r Peter Reubens is gon on Sunday last, the 14/4 of this month," he wrote to his king in December 1631, "wth a Trumpetter towards Bergen op Zom, wth ful power for to give y^e fatall stroke unto Mars, and life unto this State & the Empire.

"This voyage was resolved since y^e defeate of the Challoupe-Army, but not knowne of any living Soule, save the Infanta and the Marquis d'Aytona. . . .

"The other particularities are come to my knowledge by one Mons. Montfort, Gardes-Dames to y^e Infanta, who is solely in trust wth S^r Peter Rubens, who, before his departure from this Court, gave me just subject of suspicion that he was bound for some important journey, for I, being entred in discourse wth him on the French business, he let slip a word that he had one in hand, the good successe whereof may tend to the salvation of this State and the Empire: I replied, that sure (as every one here would kill y^e king of Sweden) he was not to dispatch a Ravalac: he saide, my dis-

patch is but one letter, w^{ch} I saw him receive from the Infanta, under a covert without superscription. I told him that sure he was to goe for Holland, which he slighted as being a time unfitt, but next morning he was gon for Antwerpe. His Confident Mons. Montfort told me since the truth of it and that the designes of Spaine where to send the one part of the troupes of this State to Italie and the other for the defence of the Palatinate.”

Rubens's mission only lasted nine days, of which only two were spent at the Hague, where he interviewed the Prince of Orange. The interview was not obtained without some difficulty, which, said the Prince, he had raised solely for appearances. “So each of us plays his comedy,” was Gerbier's comment to Lord Dorchester. However, Rubens had no success, and the trumpeter was not called upon to blow any triumphal blasts.

Eight months later Rubens made another effort for peace with Holland. He met the representatives of the States-General at Liège, returned to Brussels to report, again negotiated at Liège, and finally interviewed the Prince of Orange once more, this time in his camp before Maestricht. Once more Rubens failed; and, considering the recent successes of the Dutch armies, that was not surprising. Yet, according to Moretus, if anyone could have succeeded, it would have been Rubens. “He who knew how to make peace with England, certainly ought to be capable of concluding a truce with the Dutch, especially since he is highly favoured by the Prince of Orange, who knows him well.”

However, others were now set to the task. On the

advice of the Duc D'Aerschot, the Infanta summoned the States-General of the Catholic Low Countries, who had not met for thirty-two years. Their first request was for power to treat directly with the Dutch States-General. The Flemish nobility were jealous of the Spaniards employed by the Infanta, jealous also of her special favourites, such as Rubens, who were not of the old ruling caste. The Infanta acceded to their request, but asked Rubens to go to the Hague to oversee the negotiations and guard her own interests and those of the King of Spain.

The Catholic States-General appointed ten deputies to treat with Holland, of which the chief were the Archbishop of Malines and Philippe Charles, Duc D'Aerschot, Prince-Comte D'Arenberg. Already jealous of Rubens's previous secret missions, these nobles were much perturbed to learn that he had demanded and obtained a fresh passport for Holland. At a meeting on 4th January 1633 they resolved to ask the Infanta what were his instructions, and to remonstrate with her against his intervention. Isabella replied evasively that Rubens had obtained his passport that he might be at the Hague if he was wanted, and particularly to supply them with any papers that might be necessary, but not to interfere in the negotiations. The truth was that she had expressly forbidden him to show any papers relating to his secret missions, and had appointed him as a controller of the States-General.

The Duc D'Aerschot, a brusque and arrogant noble, particularly sensitive on the rights of high rank and particularly brutal to those who were his social inferiors, did not believe the Infanta and was furious with her confidant.

The deputies left Brussels on 28th January and stayed for twenty-four hours in Antwerp. Rubens, acting under orders, neither called on D'Aerschot nor communicated his papers to him, but wrote him this letter:

“MONSEIGNEUR,—I am very grieved to learn the resentment Your Excellency has shown at my demand for a passport, for I stand upon firm ground, and entreat you to believe that I shall always be able to give a good account of my actions. I protest, therefore, before God, that I have never had any orders from my superiors but to serve Your Excellency in all ways, in the conduct of this affair, so necessary for the service of the King and the preservation of the country; that I should esteem him unworthy of life who, for his private interests, should retard it in the smallest degree. I do not see, however, what inconvenience could have resulted if I had taken my papers to the Hague and put them into Your Excellency's hands, without other office or quality than to render you my very humble service, desiring nothing else in this world so much as occasions to show by my deeds that I am with my whole heart, etc.”

This letter was, under political necessity, equivocal, and it is to be regretted that Rubens's service forced him into such a path. But at least it was polite. D'Aerschot replied in character and thereby won a grim notoriety.

“MR RUBENS,—I see by your letter how grieved you

are that I have shown resentment at your demand for a passport, and that you stand upon firm ground, and entreat me to believe that you will always be able to give a good account of your actions. I might well have omitted to do you the honour of answering you, considering how grossly you have failed in your duty by not coming to see me in person and by making a secret of the matter and sending me your letter, which is proper between persons of equal station. I was at the inn ¹ from eleven o'clock till half-past twelve, and returned there in the evening at half-past five, and you had ample time to come and speak with me. Nevertheless, I will tell you that the whole assembly at Brussels found it very strange that, after having entreated Her Highness and required the Marquis D'Aytona to order you to communicate the papers to us, which you wrote to me were in your hands, and though they had promised us they would do so, that you should have asked for a passport; for it matters little to me upon what ground you stand and what account you can render of your actions. All I can tell you is that I shall be greatly obliged if you will learn from henceforth how persons of your station should write to men of mine. And then you may be assured that I shall be, etc."

His Excellency was delighted with this little masterpiece of petty arrogance, and showed copies round both the States-General and sent them to the Infanta, D'Aytona, and Philip of Spain, and when they were all met at the Hague he went about saying that he had not brought Rubens, because painters had nothing to do with the mission—" *che non tengono bisogno ne*

¹ L'Hôtel de L'Aigle.

hanno che fare pittori," as the Venetian ambassador reported.

Rubens waited for news at Brussels, but having none by 5th February returned home to Antwerp.

William Boswell, the English envoy to the Hague, writing of the matter to Sir John Coke, said plainly:

"I heare S^r P. Rubens is quite of, of any employements this waie, especially by the opposi^con of the Dep^{ties}, because hee is none of their bodie, if not rather because he is an immediat Minister of their King, and having more sperit than any member of them, hath acquired so much more envie among them."

Rubens had not finished with the Duc D'Aerschot. In May His Excellency read to the States-General at Brussels certain letters, which had come to him from the Hague, in which it was stated that Rubens, under the order of the Infanta, had written to Holland for passports for new deputies, who would be furnished with special instructions. The States-General were profoundly upset, and D'Aerschot was charged to forward these letters to the Infanta. She replied that they were forgeries. Rubens himself interviewed Baron D'Hoboken, who was completely satisfied and persuaded the States-General to agree with him.

Having failed to show up Rubens this time, D'Aerschot fell back on malicious inventions far unworthier even than his impertinent letter. His caste pride was not sufficient to prevent him from concocting a preposterous tale to the effect that Rubens had designed tapestries for the Prince of Orange, "in w^{ch} the King

of Spaine and his subjects (were) most hideously represented, w^{ch} invention proves but malice of the said Duke, S^r Peter Rubens never having thought on such a thing." Thus Gerbier reported the affair to Sir Arthur Hopton.

At the end of the year an event occurred which deeply affected Rubens, a man accustomed to dear losses. His old mistress and friend, the Infanta Isabella, died on 1st December. Already her successor, the Cardinal Infant Don Ferdinand, had set out for Brussels. He had left Spain in the spring, but had not yet arrived in Flanders; he had remained in Milan on business of war and peace. In the meantime the government of the Catholic Low Countries was entrusted to the Marquis D'Aytona.

Rubens celebrated the death of his sovereign with an engraving very much in the fashion of the time, a kind of puzzle that required most learned elucidation. Moretus rendered its significance. Over her head was the evening star, to show that Spain was her country; her golden ancestors were indicated by a chain of golden coins. The imperial crown, the laurel, the sceptre and the crown showed that she was the daughter of Philip II, granddaughter of Charles Quint, and the descendant of so many illustrious emperors. A bunch of lilies indicated the Valois blood in her veins. Two genii, one with the caduceus, the other with the thunderbolt, stood for the peaces which she had negotiated and the wars which she had sustained. A turtle dove symbolised her widowhood, and a rudder and a globe her sovereignty. So the Master poured out his art and learning to do honour to his princess.

Now Rubens had returned again to his proper work, sick and weary of the dirt in the political arena. Peiresc, who had long kept silence because of the strained relations between France and Spain, and because Rubens was known to be of Maria's party, at last wrote to him in November 1634. Rubens's reply witnessed his delight at re-entering his old way of life.

"Your letter was so unexpected a favour that, at the moment of receiving it, I was as astonished as I was delighted; and then I was wonderfully anxious to read it. . . . For three years now I have found peace of spirit, by God's grace. I have renounced any kind of employment that could take me away from my dear profession: *experti sumus invicem fortuna et ego*. I owe much to fortune, for I can say, without undue pride, that my missions and travels in Spain and England have most happily succeeded; I have treated the most grave business to the entire satisfaction of my employers, and even of both the contracting parties. And that you may know all, I have since been entrusted, I alone, with the whole secret negotiation with France touching the flight of the Queen-Mother and the Duc D'Orléans from the kingdom of France, and the permission they have been given to find sanctuary here. I could furnish much matter to an historian, and tell him the real truth of this affair, which is very different from what is generally believed.

"When I found myself in this labyrinth, troubled night and day with a procession of importunate affairs, exiled from my house for nine months, obliged to be continually at court, arrived as I was at the height of

favour in the eyes of the most serene Infanta (whom God hold in His glory) and of the first ministers of the King, honoured with the approbation and esteem of those foreigners with whom I treated, I took the resolution to do violence to myself and to cut the golden knot of ambition, so that I might recover my liberty. Considering that one should make such a retreat while yet climbing, and not when falling, should abandon fortune when she favours one, and not wait until she turns her back, I seized the opportunity of a small secret journey to throw myself at the feet of Her Highness and pray her, as only recompense for so many labours, to set me free of new undertakings and to authorise me to do my service without leaving my house. I had more difficulty in winning this favour than any which she has ever granted me, and even then I was retained for certain negotiations and secret affairs of state, with which I can continue to deal without disturbing myself greatly. Since then I have not mixed myself up further in French affairs, and I have never repented that I took that resolution. Now, as you have learnt, I find myself by God's grace with my wife and my children, in peace, and having no other hope in the world but to live in peace."

So the common touch rang down the curtain on Rubens's public life, and the Master went about his last few years fulfilling his mighty function as the Apelles of his age, and one of the giants of the spirit through all ages.

It may be added that the negotiations between the two States-General came to nothing, and Rubens did not live to see the European peace he had dreamed

of. D'Aerschot, who rashly went to visit Madrid, was thrown into prison for his part in a conspiracy of Belgian nobles against Spain, a conspiracy of which Gerbier had sold the secret to the Infanta. The sad and foolish Duke died in his cell.

CHAPTER XIX

OLD AGE

ALTHOUGH the politician had been to the forefront in recent years, Rubens had not neglected either the artist or the antiquarian in himself. "On my travels," he wrote to Peiresc, "I have never ceased to view and study either the antiquities exhibited to the public or those in private collections, nor have I ever ceased to buy curios: I kept back certain pieces, the rarest engraved gems and most exquisite medals, from the collection I sold the Duke of Buckingham, so that I still own a cabinet of curious and beautiful things: we will speak of it at our ease." So Rubens promised himself the old pleasures of his youth, of the days of his first wife, before the golden knot of ambition tied him up. He then went on to discuss an intricate method of weighing which he had seen in Spain, an antique silver spoon, and the cast of an agate vase of which he had bought the original for two thousand ecus and which had been lost in transit.

He recounted how his little Albert, now a man of twenty, had gone to Venice, and he referred to his new family, two sons and a daughter. The eldest, the daughter, Clara Joanna, had been born in 1632. She was to marry Philip van Parijs, Lord of Merxhem and Danbrugge, and to die in 1689. Frans, who was born a year later, was to marry Susanna Gratiana

Charles, and die in 1678. Alexander Joseph was to live until 1752. And there were three more children yet to be born: Isabella Helena (1635-1652), Peter-Paul (1637-1684), and his posthumous daughter Constantia Albertina, who was to become a nun at ter Kameren in 1657. He was the father, therefore, of nine children, although Clara Serena was already dead.

But the reopened correspondence with Peiresc was in danger of a short life. In May 1635 Louis XIII declared war on the Cardinal Infant. The ostensible cause was the detention by Spain of the Archbishop of Trêves: the real cause was a long soreness over many matters, particularly Spain's support of Maria. Rubens was deeply grieved. "I am by nature and inclination a man of peace," he wrote Peiresc, "and the sworn enemy of disputes, law suits, and all quarrels, whether public or private. . . . I hate like the pest all chicanery and all kinds of dissension: I hold that the first wish of every honest man should be to enjoy tranquillity of spirit at home and abroad, to render service when he may and to do wrong to none. I regret that all kings and princes are not of that opinion."

Rubens's political work had proved the truth of that statement. Although he could do nothing in the trouble between France and Spain, he could not resist offering to make one final effort to bring about peace between Holland and Spain. The Dutch had appointed an ex-burgomaster, one Van Berckel, to negotiate. Being an old friend of Antoine Triest, the Bishop of Ghent, he approached that prelate, who immediately went off to Antwerp to confer with Rubens. Rubens was prepared to undertake another mission to Holland, but the Dutch States-General, under pressure from France, their new ally, would

not grant his passport. Rubens was saved from a further labour, which only his keen love of peace and loyalty to his government could have made him undertake.

“And since,” he wrote to Peiresc, “there was no lack of people who were most anxious to embark on such a mission, I was able to keep myself for domestic peace, and, with God’s grace, I found myself, and still find myself, at home, very contented and very ready to serve you.”

One of the principal works on which Rubens was now engaged was a commission from Charles I for paintings to decorate the ceiling of Whitehall banquetting chamber, a commission which had been mooted by his father, James I, as far back as 1621. The subject was the glorification of the reign of that unwashed monarch, an even less promising theme than Rubens had had for the Medici series. In the same way, he fell back on allegory and bolstered up his feeble royalty with the magnificence of myth. The price agreed on for these pictures was three thousand pounds sterling, a colossal sum in those days. However, Rubens did not receive it very promptly. “I am not yet paid,” he wrote to Peiresc, “and that might surprise me if I were a novice in these affairs. But long experience has taught me how slowly princes go in matters of finance, and how much easier it is for them to do ill than to do well. I do not yet despair of being satisfied, for my friends in that court hold out good hope to me, never ceasing to assure me that the King will treat me in a manner worthy of us both.”

Rubens had meant to go with the pictures himself,

and almost now regretted that he had not. But he was determined to let nothing trouble him. He was old, as age was reckoned in the seventeenth century, and time had calmed his vast activity, or at least chained it all to his easel. He was rich and famous and beloved, and he needed to trouble himself no further; his remaining business in the world was to enjoy quietly the golden evening of his glorious, labouring day.

He wrote briefly of a law suit then in progress in France concerning his copyrights in engravings, but stated frankly that he did not care what the upshot might be. "Let us leave these bagatelles that are not worthy of such long and tiresome discussion," he said, and then plunged into matters of classic architecture.

A great calm and width of vision had settled on this giant spirit, which had so long and so bravely taken its place in the world. His art and his learning and his tender domestic love—the common touch—now took entire possession of him, and he stood aloof from the turmoil like a lofty elm that has forgotten its struggles for growth, and whose roots have become stronger than the soil which nourished them, and whose mighty head rears high above the pushing undergrowth that once it brothered.

When he painted himself about this time, he saw a man still hale, still bearing himself as a cavalier, his hat tilted jauntily and his cloak flung over his shoulder with a fine gesture. His left hand, that had so long held his précieux palette, lay at rest on his swordhilt, strong and yet delicately tipped; his hair still fell luxuriously on to his fine ruff. It was the same face that he had painted many times before, with the same dandiacal beard and noustache, the same tender kind-

liness in the mouth; but now he found that his eyes no longer looked out on the world so confidently. They were a little sad and a little reflective. Though his art still sounded his triumphal joy in the eternal progress of nature, the eternal pulse of material life through all the universe, his spirit was wearied with unprofitable things. Kings and princes had passed before his discerning eyes, kings and princes whom he had served faithfully to little good; and he had learnt that the warm limbs of a peasant girl, or the rich harvest of autumn fields, counted for more in the mighty rhythm than all the sterile policies of courts. He had learnt to see God in a woman's breasts and the devil in a politician. Though he had been statesman and man of affairs, he learnt from his own eyes that he was most an artist and a dreamer, neither artist nor dreamer of pallid twilights nor exotic nights, but the huge interpreter of high day, the prophet of health and vigour and fruitful beauty. Peter-Paul had reached the apogee of his greatness and stood stripped of the tinsel of the world.

Yet he was far from being a gloomy recluse or morbid preacher of vanity. His optimism remained, but it was not blind; he was disillusioned in many things, but he had not been embittered. Therefore he did not turn from the next honour that came to him. His business still lay in the great world. In April 1636 he was sworn in as painter to the Cardinal Infant, who thus continued the patronage of his predecessors. And indeed this was not surprising, since Rubens had figured so largely in the reception accorded to Don Ferdinand by the City of Antwerp.

Ferdinand had been, it will be remembered, at Milan when the Infanta died. He crossed the Alps

with a large army, and in Germany fell in with the Austrian army under the command of the King of Hungary. The two princes marched together against the Protestant forces under Bernard of Saxe-Weimar. They met at Nordlingen, where the Catholics won a notable victory. Fresh from the glory of this exploit, the new governor entered Brussels on 9th November 1634. His solemn entry to Antwerp was planned for the following January, but owing to the excessive cold it was postponed until April.

Ferdinand had been born to the purple and very nearly to the scarlet. He was only nine years old when he was made Archbishop of Toledo, and only eleven when he was made cardinal. But when he was twenty he cried to the King: "Rid me of these cardinal's robes, that I may go to the war." He went, and he became governor of the Netherlands. When Rubens painted him for the second time, it was in armour and not in scarlet. But for all his militarism he was a fragile, pale, blue-and-yellow young man, with the air of an Osric; a most unlikely young man to take to Flemish ways. "The people here really live like beasts," he wrote to his brother the King.

Rubens, the master Fleming, was entrusted with the task of overseeing and designing the decorations for the Infant's entry into Antwerp. It was no matter of strips of bunting and beribboned poles.

The Cardinal Infant left Brussels on 16th April with Prince Thomas de Carignan, brother of the Duke of Savoy, his suite, and the highest of the Flemish nobility. He embarked at Willebroek, and, escorted by hundreds of ships, sailed up the Rupel and the Schelde to Antwerp. He landed at Kiel and passed the night there. About four o'clock of the next after-

noon he issued with a dazzling troop of horsemen and approached St George's gate, which was newly painted and gilded. Here he was met by the Burgo-master and the six Guilds. He entered Antwerp to a tornado of guns and trumpets, and then he encountered the first work by the Master he had come to rule over. It was a triumphal car, on which young girls—to whom Ferdinand was never averse—were disposed in sumptuous arrangement. One of them, who personified Antwerp, presented him with a crown of laurel on a gold salver. At the end of St George's Street was a stage representing Welcome, and composed of panels, designed by Rubens and partly executed by his own hand. And so he went on his way, through triumphal arches to his glory and to that of his royal brother, all beflagged and gilded and painted and carved; through the portico of the emperors, an immense curve of twelve arches, with a gilded column in the centre, ornamented with coloured glass and twelve stone emperors; by torches, laurels, garlands, and escutcheons; past the memorial stage to the Infanta, the Temple of Janus, the stage of the Guild of St Luke, the stage of the Chamber of Rhetoric, vast bannered pillars bearing statues of the patron saints of the magistrates; through the triumphal arch erected by the Mint, the triumphal arch of Hercules Prodicus; past Giants and Elephants and Ships in sumptuous replica, to the sound of music everywhere, and by a deal of Latin eulogy; and thus Ferdinand made the most splendid entry in history, and gave his opportunity to the greatest master of the splendid and the grandiose.

Rubens was not there to see his work. Worn out with his labours, he was sick and confined to his house. But the Cardinal Infant of Spain came to pay his respects

to the glory of Antwerp, and to see the palace where the ageing artist still lived in cultured magnificence.

But Rubens was soon to feel the attraction of the country, which, in its undisturbed, unalterable growth, its divine march through the cycle of the seasons, was so completely in accord with his new-found serenity, a serenity in which there was nothing of decay. Rubens was never to know the winter of life, the shrivelled and silver days; he lived now, and was to die in the fruitful, golden autumn. In May 1635 the Council of Brabant recognised him as purchaser of the Lordship of Steen, with the land, woods, and meadows depending on it. This estate was in the parish of Elewijt, about six leagues from Antwerp. It was not his first country-house. Eight years before he had bought the castle of Ursele at Eeckeren, north of Antwerp, but the house was too small for what he held to be the necessary grandeur of his life, even in the country, and the district was marshy and unhealthy.

Steen, which was to be his summer residence for the remainder of his days, was, as an advertisement of sale in 1682 described it, "a manorial residence, with a large stone house and other fine buildings in the form of a castle, with garden, orchard, fruit-trees, and drawbridge, and a large hillock on the middle of which stands a square tower, having also a lake and a farm with farmhouse, granges, divers stables, and outbuildings, measuring in all four bundaren fifty roederen (something over ten acres), the whole surrounded by moats." The building was in red brick, with windows and door-frames in white stone, and the style of architecture was that of the Flemish Renaissance of the mid-sixteenth century. It was a

feudal estate, giving powers of appointing steward, officers, and vassals of the manorial land, and Sir Peter-Paul now became Lord of Steen.

There, during the summers, he painted landscapes, leaving his more lordly commissions for Antwerp and the winters. From sheer love and sympathy he turned his mature and magnificent powers to rendering nature, which the old man now found as stirring as for so long he had found the naked limbs of men and women. These landscapes he painted for love of painting, though his hands might well have grown tired that had laboured as no other artist's have ever done. And there he enjoyed the company of his beautiful Helena, the good wine of Ay, and the figs and pears of Rosile which William, his gardener, sent him from the long-cultivated gardens of the house on the Wapper. And there, in his retreat, as witness that the great world had not forgotten him, he received such presents as the weighty gold chain which Charles I sent him in gratitude for the Whitehall paintings and for old friendship.

Among the important works which he executed at this time in Antwerp were two series of pictures for Philip of Spain to decorate the Torre della Parada and the Buen Retiro, two royal country residences. The Cardinal Infant kept Philip well informed of the progress of these works, for among kings and princes it was not then considered trivial to be preoccupied with art. There is a continual reference in the letters to the slowness of the assistants and the activity of Rubens. He was neither too proud to be hurried, nor too old to enjoy his accustomed dash. Yet there were moments of regret, when he wished that he had more leisure.

"I have a great love of the city of Cologne," he wrote to the painter, George Geldorp, "where I was brought up until the age of ten, and I have often thought for many years that I should like to revisit it. But I fear the difficulties of our times and my occupations will ever be obstacles to the fulfilment of this wish as of many others."

The Cardinal Infant certainly gave him no rest; and yet he was reasonable. "I have had a little dispute with Rubens," he wrote the King on one occasion, "because he says that although all the work is finished, we must wait until it is dry or the pictures will be spoilt when they are rolled. He thinks it will take twenty days or a month, as the sun only coming out now as by a miracle, they will not be dry in less time. I tried to argue with him as much as possible, but as he knows more than I do, I had to give in."

This determination of Rubens not to have his work spoiled at the whim of princes, was well set off by the humility with which he wrote to the painter Josse Suttermans of his *Evils of War*. "I fear that the picture, having been so long in its packing case, the colours may have suffered a little, specially the reds, and that the whites may have yellowed slightly. But since you are so great a man in our profession, you will easily remedy this by exposing the picture to the sun and leaving it there at intervals. If necessary, I gladly permit you to retouch it, where accident or my negligence may make it desirable."

There was another occasion on which Rubens and the Infant came to argument. "There is one thing which he would not correct," the prince wrote, "and that is the excessive nudity of the three goddesses (in

the *Judgment of Paris*). But he says that it is necessary because it brings out the colours." And then the Infant added graciously, as if to show how willing he was to be resisted by the Master: "The Venus, who is in the centre of the group, is an excellent portrait of his wife, who is without doubt the prettiest woman here." In such matters the Cardinal Infant knew what he was talking about as well as Rubens.

But from 30th June 1638 the Infant's letters begin to have an ominous and often-repeated note. "Rubens has been much troubled with gout"; "Rubens has not been able to work because of the gout, although now he is working well"; "Rubens has been very ill"; and then, on 11th December, "Rubens has received the last sacraments." But he recovered and work went on. On 29th August 1639 the Cardinal Infant reported, "Rubens has no gout . . . Rubens works with great zeal." But once more in the following January, "Rubens has so suffered from gout that he has not been able to work"; and in April, "Rubens has been paralysed in the hands for more than a month, without great hope that he will ever again hold his brushes." But then again in May, "Rubens's health is better." So Don Ferdinand of Spain, writing to his royal brother, gave the fluctuating bulletin of the Master's long illness.

In the April of 1640 Rubens resigned his post of Secretary to the Privy Council in favour of his son Albert. On the 9th May he wrote his last letter, a personal note to an old pupil and friend, Lucas Faidherbe, who had recently married Marie Smeyers.

"SIR,—I learnt with great pleasure that on the first of this month you planted the may in the garden of

your well-beloved. I hope that it will be welcome, and that in due time it will bear fruit. My wife, my two daughters, and I wish with all our hearts that you and your companion will enjoy every kind of happiness and a perfect and lasting contentment in the state of marriage. Do not hurry to make the little ivory child, for you have in hand the making of another child of much greater importance. In any event, your visit will greatly please us.

"I believe that my wife is going in a few days to Malines, to go on to Steen, and then she will have the pleasure of wishing you well in person. In the meantime, please give my most cordial regards to your father-in-law and your mother-in-law. Your goodness will, I hope, increase from day to day their pleasure in your alliance. I send the same regards to your father and your mother, who must be secretly delighted that your trip to Italy has not taken place, and that instead of losing her well-loved son, she has won a daughter, who will soon, with God's help, make her a grandmother. And so, I remain with all my heart."

On the last day of that May Gerbier wrote from Brussels: "S^r Peter Rubens is deadly sick. The Physicians of this Towne being sent unto him for to trye their best skill on him." He was already under the treatment of two Antwerp doctors and two barber-surgeons and two apothecaries.

Rubens was now an old man. He had been vigorous in health all his life, but he had tried his body with many tasks. This is the record of all his illnesses, a good record for the seventeenth century. Far back in 1614 he had suffered from dizziness, for which Ercole Bianchi, a Milanese amateur, had

sent him a remedy. He had been ill again eight years later, while at work on the Medici Gallery, and four years after that he had had a severe fever. He had first suffered from gout in Paris in 1626, when he had been negotiating his deal with Buckingham. Afterwards he had written to Dupuy: "May I in the future be free from the familiarities and attacks of this domestic enemy. I hope I have left him at the French frontier." Alas! for Rubens, he had not. The domestic enemy revisited him two years later at Madrid, when he was cured by Don Fabrice Valguarnera de Beltrano, a Sicilian, "of middle height and large, ruddy countenance, who spoke Spanish badly, had a hernia, and wore bandages." He was a painter, an amateur of curios, a mathematician, and a doctor of law and medicine, who afterwards became notorious for a diamond robbery which he carried out with the husband of his mistress. He had been, at any rate temporarily, successful with Rubens, whom the gout had not troubled again until 1635, when it prevented him from going to England to hang the Whitehall pictures. Now it had come back, violently and triumphantly. He made his will on 27th May, leaving Helena half his great property and the share of one child, dividing the remainder equally among his children, but leaving his books to Albert, and his agates and medals to Albert and Nicholas. He gave pictures and other presents to many people and churches and to the poor. Three days later, about noon, with Helena Fourment by his side carrying his last child in her womb, Peter-Paul died. It was the 30th May 1640. "He has left us," wrote the Abbé de St Germain, "that he may go to see the originals of all his great paintings."

That evening Rubens's body was laid in a ribbed coffin of hard wood, and a procession of monks carried it to the family vault of the Fourments in the church of St Jacques. The funeral service was held on 2nd June. At the head of the procession were the clergy of St Jacques and all the Chapter; they were followed by monks and friars of all the orders in Antwerp, and sixty orphan children; then came the Guild of St Luke, the magistrates and the nobility of Antwerp. They carried sixty torches, ornamented with crosses in red satin. To the music of Notre Dame they said good-bye to their greatest citizen, chanting the *Miserere* and the *Dies Iræ*. The Master of vigour and sunlight and the flower of life was last seen in a narrow coffin in a church all hung with black, by the light of six pale tapers.

When he was gone, body and soul, his friends and relatives banqueted, as he had banqueted when Isabella had left him; his relatives at his house; the Magistrature and Treasury at the town hall; the Confraternity of the Romanists at the "Golden Flower"; the Confraternities of St Luke and the Gilliflower at the "Stag." And Dominicans and Augustinians, Capuchins and Carmelites, Franciscans, Beghards, and Minimi celebrated over seven hundred masses for the repose of his soul; and at the little church at Elewijt, where they had learnt to know the Lord of Steen these last years, the village priest said twenty-four masses.

On 3rd November 1643 the Maypole was set up in the new mortuary chapel in St Jacques, and the body of Rubens was removed there. Behind the altar were two marble Corinthian pillars bearing an entablature, and above that a niche containing a Mater

Dolorosa carved by Faid'herbe. Between the pillars was hung the *Virgin with the Infant Jesus and Saints*.

The death of Rubens had been honoured with feasting, with masses, with paint and marble and Latin eulogy. The case was gone: the huge spirit remains.

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Etc.

Etc.

JAN RUBENS, + MARIA PYPELINCKX,
1530-1587. 1538-1608.

JAN BAPTIST,
1562-1600(?).

BLANDINA,
1564-1606

+
SIMON
DU PARCQ.

CLARA,
1565-1606.

HENDRIK,
1567-1583.

PHILIP,
1573-1611

BARTHOLOMEUS,
1581
(died an infant).

+
MARIA DE MOY
(sister of
Jan Brant).

ISABELLA BRANT, + PETER-PAUL, + HELENA FOURMENT,
1591-1626. 1577-1640. 1614-1673.

CLARA SERENA,
1611-1623.

ALBERT,
1614-1657

NICHOLAS
LORD OF RANEY,
1618-1655

+
CLARA DELMONTE
(sister of Helena
Fourment).

CONSTANTIA HELMAN

Seven Children.

CLARA JOANNA,
1632-1689

+
PHILIP VAN PARIJS,
LORD OF MERXEM
AND DANBRUGGE.

FRANS,
1633-1678

+
SUSANNA
GRATIANA
CHARLES.

ALEXANDER
JOSEPH,
? -1752.

ISABELLA
HELENA,
1635-1652.

PETER-PAUL,
1637-1684.

CONSTANTIA
ALBERTINA,
1641-?



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